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"GOOD-BYE," TOM SAID, "REMEMBER, MY MOTHER EXPECTS TO HEAR FROM YOU VERY SOON."

RUBY'S DESTINY

[NOVELETTE.]

(PART ONE.)

CHAPTER I.

IN the tawdry sitting-room of a very fourth-rate "appartement," in a semi-fashionable quarter of Paris, a young girl sat before the expiring embers of a wood fire in deep

thought.

It was a January evening; the cold air blew sharp and keen, penetrating through the ill-made window frames, and making the room so airy far for comfort; but though it was the night of all others on which a fire would have been a comfort—though the stout logs

lay ready to her hand, Ruby Norton made no attempt to replenish the open grate. She was so lost in thought that she had forgotten all creature discomforts.

Her eyes were fixed in eager expectancy. Her ears were strained in anxious listening towards the door, a few paces off, which led to the room where Captain Norton, her father and last surviving parent, lay dying, and whence she had been dismissed imperatively an hour before by the shrewd yet kind-hearted doctor.

But, terrible as it may sound, we must confess, even at the risk of losing all sympathy for her, it was not passionate grief which made Ruby so absorbed in her thoughts.

The man whose account was so nearly ended had never done anything to cause her to mourn him.

James Norton was a bad man, bad to the core, false to the very heart; a man whose foes despised him, and whose acquaintance—such as he never made friends—could never trust him.

There had been no mother to screen his character from the critical eyes of his young daughter, and Ruby had the gift which comes so often to the children of adventurers.

She could see things as they were, and judge for herself.

She knew perfectly that her father had forfeited the esteem of all honourable men, even though he had done nothing to place himself within reach of the law.

She knew he cared for no creature upon earth except James Norton, ex-captain in one of His Majesty's regiments, and that he would

shrink from no act which would advance his own interest and comfort.

It was a sad enough life his daughter recalled, as she let her thoughts wander to the past.

She could barely remember her mother. Only a vague instinct told her that mother's early death had been hastened by a broken heart.

There were faint memories of someone who loved her and caressed her; but the first plain recollection Ruby had was of a French pension, and herself the shabbiest and youngest of the boarders.

From six to sixteen it had been her fate to wander from pension to pension, often being dismissed on account of her father's forgetting such a trifle as to pay the bill.

Interspersed with these schooldays came the irregular visits paid to her father, wherever he might be; visits usually caused not by paternal affection, but by some irate head-mistress weary of sending in her account, in despair despatching Ruby and her boxes back to the Captain.

How well the girl recalled it all up, to the day when she was sixteen, and her father solemnly informed her she had cost him a mint of money, and must dispense with all further education.

He installed her as mistress of the cheap "appartement" where we first see her—gave her just sufficient money for clothes to prevent her shabbiness positively disgracing him, and coldly bid her be a good girl and not bother him.

It would have been a life unbearable in its loneliness but for one thing; the Captain still retained in his service the maid who had come with his wife when she left her father's house.

Deborah had been devoted to her lady, and for her sake kept faithful to her husband. The old woman (perhaps, because age is more pitiful than youth, perhaps because in her eyes he was still her young lady's handsome lover) judged her master far more tenderly than his daughter could bring herself to do. An annuity from a former employer would have kept Deborah in comfort in her native land, but she preferred to follow the fortunes of James Norton and his child.

She never had a penny of wages—indeed, she often helped on the wheels of domestic machinery from her own purse. She loved Ruby passionately; but, even for her sake, would not speak harshly of the master. A servant of the old-fashioned stamp, who had spent all her life in good families, perhaps Ruby owed to her something more than kindness. The quiet self-command, the art of making herself respected, even by the strange company Mr. Norton gathered round him, the making the utmost of her scanty wardrobe, all this had come to Ruby from her old nurse.

But dearly as she loved her—though in most things Miss Norton could, as the saying goes, "wind her old nurse round her finger"—there were two points on which Deborah maintained a discreet silence. The most urgent entreaties, the most coaxing pleading, could not induce her to tell Miss Ruby why her father left England, or whether he had any relations yet living in the country which, though she had been absent from it more than twenty years, the old woman yet called "home."

She would talk of her dead mistress by the hour, telling Ruby many an incident of her mother's life in the old country village, where her father had been vicar. Deborah said it was the old clergyman's death which set her free to accompany her young lady to France; but why the journey had to be taken, why Captain Norton, being then young and his own master, could not have married in England nurse never would say.

"Grandpapa must have been rich!" remarked Miss Ruby, thoughtfully, one day, when Nurse had received her half-yearly income of twenty pounds.

"Bless me, my dear, he was as poor as

poor could be. It was just that made me go to him when his wife died! Miss Vera—that was when your mamma—was a mite of nine, and there was no one to see to things. My lady had died, and left me independent. I told the Vicar I should trouble him for nothing but my food, and after a little hesitating he agreed. It is thirty years ago, my dear, and more."

And now, as she sat by the expiring fire, the feeling at Ruby's heart was not so much that she was going to lose her father as that she must soon be alone in the world. Precarious and uncertain as Mr. Norton's income was, it had yet kept the wolf from the door. Ruby had become used to alternate between a kind of Bohemian luxury and excessive pinching and calculating, but she had never been face to face with actual want. She had gone shabby many a time; she had dined before now on bread and fruit, but she had never yet been reduced to the certainty that when the money in the house was spent she had no more, and no chance of any unless she earned it. She could not live on Nurse, that was certain; she must do something, but what?

In some things precocious beyond her age, Ruby was in others perfectly ignorant. She knew, of course, that teaching and dress-making were common channels of female industry, but her own education had been too interrupted to make her competent for the first, and the second she shrank from. One gift she had—a beautiful voice, but to make money by it it would need cultivation, and that was beyond her reach.

Blame her not that she could think of her own future when her father was dying. James Norton had done nothing to call forth her love or earn her gratitude.

He had told her again and again she was a burden to him, had cursed the day she was born to him, instead of his eagerly-desired son (though what good an heir would have been to him, seeing he had nothing to bequeath, Ruby could not guess); he had taunted her before now with her shabbiness; he had outraged every feeling of her heart long before she had emerged from childhood.

She was afraid of him, and yet, strange anomaly, she despised him. She knew he was a bad man, and all poor Nurse's arguments that he was a gentleman and must have his own way, and allowances made for him, influenced her nothing.

"It's in the blood, my dear," said Nurse one day. "The Nortons were always a little wild."

"A little wild!" Ruby's lips curled in scorn. "Are all the Nortons bad? Do none of them ever speak the truth? If so, it seems to me, Nurse, it is rather a misfortune to be born a Norton."

It was no sudden illness that had laid the Captain low. He had been attacked by a strange feverish ague in the autumn, and had never regained his strength, but of late he had sunk rapidly.

He had even perceived it himself, and written a few letters. Ruby wondered to whom, but she was not allowed to touch them.

Nurse, who would hardly stir from the sick room, even for her meals, had put on her bonnet and posted them with her own hands. That was three or four days ago. One letter—perhaps a reply—had come that very afternoon; but the patient had been asleep, and not even for such a marvel as a foreign letter would Deborah suffer him to be disturbed.

The gilt clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven, and Ruby shivered and shivered again. Before its last echo had died away the door of the sick room opened, and Mr. Darby came out—a clever, straightforward man, who had pitched his tent in Paris and established a good practice among his compatriots.

He had attended Captain Norton for two months without seeing the colour of his money. He already suspected he never should see it, but he was not the man for that reason to withhold his aid; besides, he had

girls of his own, and his heart ached for Ruby.

She had started up now to meet him, a tall slip of a girl, with that combination rarely seen of luxuriant black hair and large, expressive blue eyes.

She was barely twenty, and yet very soon she would be alone in the world.

The man lying in the next room had not been much to boast of as a parent; but, at least, he had given the girl a home—a kind of careless protection from the cold, rough world.

"My dear," said the doctor, "he is asking for you. Can you be calm? Remember, any agitation will do him harm. Can you command yourself?"

She shivered violently as she rose to follow him, but that was her only sign of emotion.

In a kind of hushed voice she asked:

"Is he no better?"

"He never can be better in this world, my child! It is only a question of a few hours, perhaps a few minutes!"

Deborah would have drawn back when the young lady entered the sick room; but the dying man made her a sign to keep her place.

Mr. Darby lingered too. It mattered nothing. Ruby and her father had not lived in that tender affection which makes a stranger's presence seem sacrilegious at the last sad goodbye.

"Well," said Mr. Norton, gruffly, as he looked at her, "I suppose they have told you it's nearly over?"

She bowed her head.

"You need not pretend to be sorry!" he sneered. "I daresay you'll manage to get on very well without me. Your uncle has asked to offer you a home."

"My uncle?"

"Don't repeat my words like an echo!" said the sick man querulously. "My twin brother must be your uncle, I suppose? Very well! Then he has sent to say you can live with him. It won't be very lively," and the Bohemian gave a grim smile, as though some recollection amused him, "but it will be respectable."

"Does my uncle live in England?"

"Where else should he live? He lives at the Court, the place that ought to have been mine—that would have been mine but for a moment's folly. And, listen to me, Ruby. Don't trust your uncle; never believe a word he says to you. When he speaks to you faintest doubt him most. He is rich, ay, rich as a lord, but it all came to him by fraud. If only I had had money I would have fought it out, ay, to the bitter end!"

"You must not excite yourself," said the doctor, gravely. "And, indeed, Captain, you are giving Miss Norton cruel advice! Why should you attempt to prejudice her against her new home?"

"She'll find him out for herself," said the father, coolly. "She has plenty of brains; but it's only fair to warn her. And, remember, my girl, your face is your fortune, and you must do the best you can with it. I've made a muddle of my life, but you may do better with yours."

He sank back exhausted on his pillow, and was silent for a few moments. When he spoke again his mind seemed to wander. His eyes were fixed on Ruby, but surely his words were not for her.

"It is nearly over, my darling!" he said, faintly, "and I am coming to you. I haven't done much for the child. You see, I could never forgive her she was not a boy; but maybe you'll understand; you always made allowances for me, Vera!"

And Ruby knew then he was speaking to her mother.

With the first tender impulse she had felt towards him for years she stooped down, and tried to take his hand, but he wrenched it away with a gleam of departing strength, and murmured hoarsely:—

"You are not like her. She was gentle and

affectionate. You are a Norton. Remember, John Norton is your uncle, but you must not trust him. Even when he seems kindest, beware of him. He hated you before you were born, and he will go on hating you to the end."

The old nurse said something in a low voice, but James Norton only shook his head impatiently, and continued, fiercely:

"He must hate her. Isn't she my child? Besides, he was always mean. Why does he offer her a home if he has no evil object? But she is a Norton and no fool; she can hold her own if she chooses."

That was all. He never spoke again. He had gone to his last account without one word of affection or regard, no kind farewell, not one tender look or fatherly caress. Mr. Darby had stood by many a deathbed, but he thought he had never witnessed a sadder one than this.

Very gently he led the orphan girl back to the sitting-room and placed her in a chair beside the fire, which some servant had rekindled.

"My dear," he said, kindly, "this is a terrible time for you, but you must not attach too much importance to your poor father's last words. Very often illness makes a man take up unfounded prejudices. Your uncle may be all that is generous and estimable. I think his being willing to offer you a home shows he can have only kindly feelings to you."

Ruby pushed back her hair from her face, and looked up thoughtfully into the doctor's face.

"I wish you would tell me all you know?"

"About what, my dear?"

"About us! Try to make it plain to me if you can. You know how poor we are, yet my father spoke of his brother as rich. Then, if we have relations, why have I never heard anything about them?"

Mr. Darby looked perplexed.

"Your father was the last man to take strangers into his confidence. I assure you that, though I have known him for years, I never had any idea till to-night that he was one of the Westshire Nortons."

"But is he?"

"He must be. He said his brother was master of Norton Court. I know the Nortons are an old and honourable family, and that they have lived in Westshire for centuries—a little wild, perhaps, but a grand old race!"

"And this man, my uncle?"

The doctor shook his head.

"My dear, I have not been in Westshire for thirty years. The Squire then living was an old man—a bachelor with two nephews, whom he had educated and brought up. The young men were away. I met the old gentleman once or twice. He was a fine specimen of an English landowner. I can only conclude that the nephews I never met were your father, and your unknown uncle"—he hesitated—"but, I assure you, you need have no fears for the future. Norton Court is one of the finest estates in Westshire, and the Squire's niece will be able to hold her own with anyone."

Ruby looked thoughtfully into the fire.

"I wonder if Nurse knows?"

"Mrs. Charles. The very person. She will be able to give you all particulars, and now I must leave you. Mrs. Darby shall come round early in the morning, and see if she can help you, and, of course, I will send off a telegram to your uncle as soon as possible."

The old Nurse, coming in, found Ruby in her old position, staring into the fire as though she read some story within there.

"My poor dear!"

Ruby buried her head in Deborah's lap, and said, brokenly:

"I feel so strange. Oh! Nurse, is he really dead? Are you and I really alone in the world?"

"The master's gone to his rest, Miss Ruby," said Nurse, whose simple mind was troubled with no theological doubts as to the after fate of one who had been such a sinner as James

Norton, "and you're left behind; but, my dear, you mustn't go to give way and fret."

That was the strangest pang in Ruby's heart—the feeling she could not grieve. They were father and child, yet she felt not one grain of honest sorrow at his death. Her whole life would be changed. She might regret the old free and easy life, the little "appartement" which, poor and shabby genteel as it was, had yet been "home" to her, but she would never regret the man who had been its master. He had neglected her too utterly, wounded her girlish heart too often for that.

"I am not going to fret," she said, gently; "but, Deb, it is all so strange. I want to understand. Who is my Uncle John? Did you ever see him?"

"Me ever see him!" exclaimed Deborah, indignantly. "Why, I was once maid to his mother, Miss Ruby. My husband was under-gamekeeper at the Court, and when I was left a widow nothing would satisfy my lady—she was Lady Florence Norton, your grand-mamma—but that I should have lessons in dressmaking and hairdressing, and go and live with her as maid. She lived all the year round with her brother-in-law, the Squire, she and her two sons. He was mighty fond of her, and of them, too, and wouldn't hear of her having another house. I was twenty-five, Miss Ruby, when I went to the Court, and I stayed there ten years. The twins were little boys when I went; they were fine young men when I came away. I nursed my lady in her last illness, and she left me an annuity of forty pounds. I might have stayed on as housekeeper, but Mrs. Fane had died not many weeks after the mistress, and my heart yearned after her motherless child, so I went down to the Vicarage and there I stayed till Miss Vera married your papa."

"Then Uncle John knew mamma?" hazarded Ruby, feeling sure there was something in the past hidden from her, and yet without an idea of what it could be.

"Everyone knows everyone in a small village," said Nurse, sagely. "Mr. John wasn't so much at the Vicarage as your papa. He married early, you see—not so long after his mother's death—and his wife was a very fine lady and liked to live in London."

"Then I have an aunt," said Ruby, wonderingly, "and perhaps ever so many cousins?"

"You've no aunt, Miss Ruby, unless your uncle's married of late years. He was a widower when we left England, and the last time I heard of him he was a widower still. He's fifty-three now, and I should say was a great deal too old to think of another wife. You'll be mistress of the Court, dear, and it's a fine old place."

"Nurse," cried Ruby, impatiently, "you are only playing with me. You know perfectly well I want to hear all about Uncle John. Why did my father hate him so, and why did he warn me against him? Papa disliked a great many people," added the girl, naively, "but I never heard him say quite such hard things of anyone else."

"You see, Miss Ruby," said Nurse, slowly, as one weighing her words lest she should say too much. "You see, the Court was a fine property, and not entailed. The old Squire could have divided it between his nephews, or left it to a charity even, if he pleased. Maybe your father—who had been his favourite—was a little hurt his brother should have all, and he be left out in the cold. Ah, my dear! money's a bad thing, and there have been more quarrels over it than over anything else."

Ruby felt satisfied. Her father had loved money dearly. If his twin brother had inherited any which he considered his due, it was quite enough to account for his antipathy.

"And papa wrote to Uncle John?"

"He wrote last week, my dear, a beautiful letter," said Nurse, approvingly. "He said he was not long for this world, and asked what provision his brother was willing to make for you."

It struck Ruby as rather a peculiar wording of an appeal to a rich relation, but she only asked:

"And the answer?"

"I'm bound to confess, my dear, the master was sorely put out when he got the answer!"

"It came this afternoon?"

"No, dear, it came days ago. The Squire wrote by return of post. He said he was not rich (which is a wilful lie, Miss Ruby), and could not afford to settle a fortune on you, but if you liked to come to Westshire he would give you a home at the Court until you married."

"He might have said until I died!" objected Ruby. "It means just the same thing. I shall never marry."

"That's as may be, Miss Ruby. Your father was much put out. He wouldn't even write and thank your uncle. He sent off a letter to some man in London, who manages the estate. It was the answer that came this afternoon. When he'd read it the master sent Mr. Darby for you. It was not till then I knew he'd brought himself to accept his brother's offer. He signed his will, Miss Ruby, just before you came in, and he made the Squire your guardian."

The long winter's night wore away, and late in the morning Ruby woke from her long troubled sleep of exhaustion to find Mrs. Darby sitting by her, an open telegram in her hand.

"I could not bear to wake you before, my dear, but it is nearly eleven, and we have had an answer from your uncle!"

"So soon?" murmured Ruby, in surprise.

"He gives the doctor power to act for him in all things, and says he has written to you. I expect you will have the letter to-morrow, and then we shall know when you must go to England."

Ruby smiled wistfully.

"I used to long to go to England, and even now I can't be sorry. I wonder if its wicked of me!"

The doctor's wife, who had taken a far sterner view of James Norton's character than poor Deborah, shook her head.

"It is only natural, dear. You have had a very sad, lonely life, and it is no wonder you look forward to a change. I have relations in Westshire, Ruby, and I know a visit to them used to be the delight of my young days. I have never seen the Court, but I believe it is a charming place, and I expect you will be very happy there. Is Mr. John Norton married?"

"Nurse says he is a widower."

"Then he is sure to be fond of you," said Mrs. Darby, kindly. "He will soon look upon you as a daughter. Ruby, I believe you are trembling!"

"Papa said he was a bad man, that I must never trust him," whispered Ruby. "Oh, Mrs. Darby, if he is kind to me can't I believe in him? You don't know what it is to go on day after day, month after month, living with a person you distrust!"

"My dear," said the lady, gently, "remember your father had not seen his brother for twenty years. You are not bound to think he may not have changed for the better in that time, even if he really deserved Captain Norton's description."

She did not add that, for her part, she considered the Captain's enmity as rather a credential to his brother's worth than otherwise, but Ruby quite understood some such idea was in her mind; indeed, it found an echo in her own.

The funeral took place that day, following the French custom, and Mrs. Darby would fain have removed the orphan to her own home, but Ruby clung to the shabby room where she had lived so long.

"It is very kind of you, but I would rather stay here. We have a good deal to do."

That was true. Captain Norton had had a brief spell of prosperity just before his death. There was money enough to defray his funeral, and pay all the little bills which came in so promptly at the news of his death.

The apartment, being let furnished by the week, could be given up at a very brief notice, and the Norton's personalities were so very few that two trunks would amply contain all that Ruby could call her own.

Mrs. Charles, however, had a vivid remembrance of the glories of Norton Court, and did not want her dear Miss Ruby to appear there in the guise of a poor relation. There were a few ornaments, a little bric-a-brac and other relics of prosperous days, which, if sold, would suffice to provide the orphan with a simple mourning outfit.

Mr. Darby approved this plan. He refused to send in his account or receive one penny for his services, and he gently cautioned the nurse against expending all the money she received. He thought that, alone, among strangers, a few pounds in her pocket might be an advantage to Ruby.

He never mentioned, except to his wife, the brief letter he had received the day after the telegram, desiring him to provide for the funeral in the cheapest possible manner, and to send the amount of that and other unavoidable expenses to the Squire. Every line of the missive told of alarm, and the kindly Darbys would not pain Ruby by telling her of it, only they both felt a little money in her pocket would be of more help to her than an elaborate wardrobe.

Nearly a week passed, and Ruby was beginning to wonder at not receiving her uncle's promised letter, when one morning a card was brought to her inscribed: "Mr. Thomas Dyason."

Deborah took it from her nursing with an expression of dismay.

"The Dyasons were your uncle's lawyers. What in the world should he send a lawyer here for, dear?"

Ruby roused herself.

"Was it Mr. Dyason who sent that letter—the letter which made my father accept his brother's offer?"

"No, dear; that was from Mr. Grey, a kind of manager and bailiff down in Westshire. The Dyasons live in London. Dear me, but he must be old by this time! He was getting grey when we left England."

The nurse was as much astonished as Ruby to receive a tall, handsome stranger, seemingly not much over thirty—a man whose grey eye inspired trust, and whose manner had a strange blending of cordiality and embarrassment.

"Miss Norton!" and he looked inquiringly at Ruby, who bowed in assent. "I am sent by your uncle, Mr. Norton, of Westshire, to bring a letter from him, and also to confer with you on one or two matters."

Ruby thought the post would have been cheaper; then, seeing that the gentleman looked at Deborah, she said, hastily:

"This is my dear old nurse, who lived at the Court when my father was a boy. You can have nothing to say to me, Mr. Dyason; that Mrs. Charles may not hear."

He shook hands with Deborah as courteously as though she had been a duchess.

"I have heard of Mrs. Charles; indeed, my father, who remembers her well, charged me if I found my mission distasteful to you, Miss Norton, to invoke your nurse's aid and sympathy."

He was so long before he spoke again that Ruby grew nervous.

"If you would give me the letter, please," she said, anxiously, "I think I should like to know the worst."

Instantly he handed it to her, and with feverish eagerness she broke the seal, Mr. Dyason looking carefully away from her lest he should seem to watch the impression it made on her, and the old nurse, with her eyes fondly fixed on her darling, waiting to hear the rich man's verdict.

Ruby Norman did not know till long afterwards how hard Thomas Dyason had resisted the errand forced on him—how it was only his father telling him he should be forced to go

himself if he refused, since the elder son could not be spared, and it was too delicate a matter to trust to a clerk.

Only the desire to save his old father the trouble and fatigue of such a journey, that had brought the young man to agree to go. Even then he yielded with much grumbling, and the remark he did not see why they should have to do all their client's dirty work just because they happened to be his lawyers.

And this was the letter:—

"DEAR NIECE,—

"I told your father I was willing to give you a 'home—plain, and, I hope I may add, respectable, though, no doubt, very different from the gay, butterfly life you have led in Paris. Though James never did me the honour to answer my letter, I am told you mean to accept my offer, and I am ready to stand by it. For our mutual comfort in the future I had better mention one or two matters. To begin with, I don't know what you have been told of me, but I am a poor man, for my position—very poor. I don't mean I'm a beggar. I pay my way, and owe no man anything, but I've no money to throw away. I am willing to provide for you at the Court, and to see that you have all the necessities of life, but you mustn't expect luxuries or amusements. Then, too, I hear your father retained Mrs. Charles in his service, which I consider a most wasteful step. She is a very worthy woman, and my late mother acknowledged it, and amply rewarded her services. I have nothing to say against Mrs. Charles, but I can't have her at the Court. Even if she were willing to come without wages, there would be her food, an important consideration. You must clearly understand on this point I am inflexible. If you are willing to part from Mrs. Charles, and to submit to the routine of my house, Mr. Dyason has my authority to settle any debts you may owe in Paris, and to conduct you safely as far as London, and see you into the train for Norton Combe, where I will send to meet you.

"Yours truly,

"JOHN NORTON."

"I cannot do it!" came from Ruby with a sob. "I cannot do it! I have no one in the world but nurse, and I can't be parted from her."

It was precisely what Thomas Dyason had expected. He had all a young man's horror of a scene, but that did not prevent all his sympathy being with Ruby. Nurse, who had taken the letter from her child's hand, read it slowly through, and then turned to the young lawyer.

"I can't understand it, sir. Is the Squire really a poor man? Folks used to say his uncle had ten thousand a year, and we heard Mr. John came in for everything."

Tom Dyason smiled.

"You are not the first person it has puzzled, Mrs. Charles. The facts are as you say. He manages the Squire's property conjointly with his agent in Westshire. Neither Mr. Grey nor my father see cause for alarm, but the Squire asserts perpetually he is a poor man, and conscientiously acts up to the assertion."

"I won't go to him," said Ruby, defiantly. "I'd rather work for my bread!"

Thomas Dyason looked grieved.

"I am very sorry to be the person to tell you bad news, Miss Norton, but I am afraid you have no choice. Your father's will left you absolutely to his brother's guardianship. Until you come of age the Squire has full power over you."

Mrs. Charles, with rare good sense and the unselfishness of her affection, came to the rescue.

"You must go, my deary. It's hard on us both, doubly hard on me, who've no one to cling to, but this gentleman's right. You've no choice in the matter. Maybe I can get a little cottage in the village, and your uncle'll let you come and see me sometimes; and you know I shall always love you, dear, even if the sea itself were between us."

"I shall hate him," said Ruby emphatically. "He must be unbearable. I feel quite sure of it!"

The point of her going seemed settled, but her indignation was hot and strong.

Tom Dyason looked at her, and wondered what such a bright, graceful picture of girlhood would do in the grim old house where the Squire lived from one year's end to another.

"Does he live all alone?" demanded Ruby, suddenly. "Does he never go out or see anyone?"

"I really don't know," said Tom, frankly. "He comes up to London for the day sometimes, to see my father, but he never sleeps away from the Court, and never has for years. Of course he has servants and that sort of thing, and I suppose his friends go to see him; but he doesn't give parties or balls, and the other festivities young ladies like. I am afraid you will find it terribly dull!"

Ruby opened her eyes.

"I never went to a party in my life!"

"Perhaps you are not 'out'?" suggested Thomas.

"I left school three years ago, and I suppose I was grown up then," said Ruby, absently, "but I don't know anything about 'coming out.'"

"I am going to see Mr. Darby," said the young lawyer, rising, when at length it occurred to him he had paid a visit of over an hour. "Do you think you can be ready to start to-morrow?"

"And leave Nurse?"

"What must be must be, Miss Ruby," said Deborah, fondly, "and the pain won't be less for putting it off. We can be ready to-morrow nicely if it suits the gentleman, and I'd rather go by Calais, if it's all one to him, for I've a niece at Dover where I can stay for a few days till I think over my plans."

Mr. Dyason departed for the Darbys, who expressed their sentiments pretty freely when they heard the tenor of the Squire's letter.

"The man must be a brute," said the doctor.

"I said as much to my father," confessed young Dyason. "He told me such opinions were unprofessional. Not that he approves of the Squire's conduct, but he has been the legal adviser of the Nortons for years, and he doesn't like to hear his clients blamed; besides, he has a great partiality for the present master of the Court. He always says he is so much to be pitied. I own I never could understand why."

"Nor I," said the doctor, drily. "From all appearance, I should put John Norton down as that most despicable of the human species—a miser."

Mr. Thomas neither confirmed nor contradicted this opinion. He only said, thoughtfully:

"I don't like him. I never did; but, after all, I don't think he would be unkind to his niece. It seems to me a face like hers must soften all hearts."

"Her father told her on his death-bed her face was her fortune," said the doctor. "I think the best fate for Ruby would be to marry some good fellow, who would never think the less of her because her father was a scapegrace."

"She is very beautiful!"

"And the strangest mixture of child and woman," said Mrs. Darby. "In some things I believe Ruby knows a great deal more than I do, but in others she is as innocent as a child. It is perfectly wonderful to me when I remember the queer acquaintances the Captain used to indulge in."

"She never knew half of them," said the doctor. "That old nurse has been very careful of her. Ruby is nineteen and a-half, but she is as ignorant as a child of flirtations and intrigue."

Mr. Dyason felt relieved at the words. Somehow he did not like to think of his temporary ward as a coquette or skilled enchan-

dress. She was very, very pretty, and he pitied her—that was all—he told himself.

So it was all settled. Nurse spared no trouble in her preparations, and the following evening she and her young lady left the apartment in the Place Rœcroi, and travelled to Calais under Mr. Dyason's escort.

He was very thoughtful not to intrude on their last hours together. He, himself, travelled in a smoking-carriage, and with a handsome silver key to the guard secured their privacy. As soon as they got on board they both went below, and he paced up and down the deck, wondering a little what he should do with his charge when her old friend had left her.

After all the girl and her second mother exchanged few confidences on the journey; their hearts were almost too full. Deborah gave Ruby a little card, with her niece's address written on it.

"Though I hope to be in Westshire almost as soon as you, write to me, deary. Norton Combe is my native village, and it will be hard if I cannot find some little cottage there to end my days in."

"Nurse," said Ruby, with dewy eyes, "we are going to be parted. Before you leave me tell me just one thing. Is my uncle a bad man?"

A simple question surely—one which asked of most people could be answered by a simple yes or no; yet Deborah, though a plain-spoken, straightforward woman, hesitated strangely over her reply.

It came at last with a strangled sob.

"I don't know, my deary. It's twenty years and more since I left England, and, remember, even when I lived at the Vicarage, I never saw much of him. He was not like your father, who had always a pleasant smile for everyone. Mr. John was old and grave beyond his years. I never took to him, but, for all that, I daren't tell you he was a bad man. He was very good to his wife, folks said, though it was no love-match."

Ruby felt more and more perplexed.

"But you don't like him?"

"Maybe I don't, Miss Ruby; but, remember, your mother was the light of my eyes, and I loved the Captain for her sake. Is it in nature I should favour the man who was rich while they were poor? But the past is past, Miss Ruby; and no Squire John deals well and generously by you I'm ready enough to like him."

It was over at last. The final good-bye had been said, and Ruby was in the train speeding away to London, Mr. Dyason opposite, watching with an air of interest her pleased curiosity at all she saw.

"And this is really your first visit to England, Miss Norton? It is hard to realise it."

"Why?"

"Because you have a perfectly English face, and you speak without the least accent, and—don't laugh at me, please—but you are not like a French girl."

"I wish Deborah could hear you. That has been her pet bugbear all these years—the fear that I should grow up like a French girl. Mr. Dyason, how long will it take to get to Norton Combe?"

"We are not going there to-day. I have my mother's orders to take you to her in Bedford Square. She says you would be far too tired if you travelled to-night to Westshire. She and your grandmother were school-fellows, though Lady Florence was much the elder of the two. My mother is nearly seventy, but she is hale and hearty still, and it will give her the greatest pleasure in the world to welcome you even for a few hours. You must know, Miss Norton, there is a strong bond between our family and yours. My father and the late Squire were boys together. My mother was married from Norton Court. The tie is such a strong one that, had your uncle only told him of the sad event in time, my father would have insisted

on going to Paris to attend the Captain's funeral."

It was still early in the forenoon when they reached Bedford Square. Thomas only stayed to introduce Ruby to a sweet, white-haired old lady, who stood in the hall to welcome them, and then hurried off to the office, where his elder brother, the real head of the firm, was a much stricter martinet than ever the kind old father had been.

"My dear," said Mrs. Dyason, gently, when she had removed Ruby's wraps with her own hands, and led her to the dining-room, where a late breakfast awaited her, "you are very like your mother. I could almost fancy Vera Fane had come back to us!"

"Did you know my mother?"

"I knew her well. The Vicar and my husband were old friends. We wanted Vera to come on us on her father's death, little thinking of all that was to happen."

"I can only just remember her," said Ruby, sadly; "and yet, tiny child as I was, I seemed to know she was unhappy. Since I have been grown up just the faint recollection I have of her always made me indignant with my father."

"Yet he loved her!"

"He loved no one but himself," said Ruby, impetuously. "Dear Mrs. Dyason, don't think me wicked, it is quite true!"

"But you should not say it, dear!"

"That is what Deborah used to tell me. She seemed to think he might do anything because he was a gentleman and a Norton. She said the Nortons were all a little wild."

Mrs. Dyason tried to hide a smile.

"At any rate, she was more forbearing than you, Ruby. She is a faithful, loyal-hearted creature."

"I never was forbearing," said Ruby, frankly. "Don't you think, Mrs. Dyason, women are as good as men, and as much right to be happy?"

"My dear child, I never thought about it. My husband and my sons have made my life very bright. It never came into my head to ask myself whether they or I had the best right to happiness!"

"You don't understand," said Ruby, gravely. "Perhaps you have only had to do with good men. Deborah is fond of me; but she always seemed to think my father had a right to do just what he pleased, because he was a man. Her idea was men might do anything, and women must submit."

"You do not look to me a submissive creature, Ruby."

"I am not," said Ruby, stoutly. "I think I am as good as a man, and that I have as much right to be comfortable. All my life it has been dinned into me that I ought to have been a boy, just as though girls were quite inferior, worthless creatures."

"Dear," said the old lady, gently. "I daresay it was hard for you to bear, but I can understand it. Don't think me disparaging my own sex, Ruby, when I tell you that both for your father and mother—ay, and others, too—it would have been far better had you been a boy!"

"Well, I wasn't," said Ruby, coldly, "and it can't be helped. I wonder if Uncle John will hate me because I belong to the inferior species?"

"I hope he will learn to love you."

A cloud passed over Ruby's face.

"I have no one to love me now I have lost Deborah; and, to tell you the truth, I expect Uncle will detest me."

"Why?"

"His letter was so intensely formal and respectable, just as though he had copied it out of a book. Now, you see, Mrs. Dyason, I always say whatever comes into my head, and never think whether it is wise or not, and then I have led a very strange life. I mean I have never had anyone to teach me to be like other girls, and I daresay, to people accustomed to properly-behaved English young ladies, I shall seem terrible."

"Don't be afraid of that, dear. You do not seem at all terrible to me, and Squire Norton

has seen so little of young ladyhood these last twenty years. I daresay he was not in a position to draw comparisons."

"Does he live all alone?" asked Ruby, "I mean alone excepting for the servants." "He has a lady housekeeper," said Mrs. Dyason, who was better informed than her son as to the internal economy of Norton Court. "She has been with him a good many years."

"And is she nice?"

"I never saw her. She is a very distant connection of the Norton family, and nursed the late Squire in his last illness."

"Has he been dead long?"

"He died a few months before your mother," said Mrs. Dyason, not choosing to add that it was the will, without a mention of her husband's name and its subsequent effect on him, which broke the young wife's heart. "Mrs. Gordon was a widow then, with one child. To our surprise, John Norton invited her to remain at the Court as housekeeper. She put the little one at a good school, and has been at Norton Court ever since!"

"Does Uncle John want to marry her?"

"If so, he would probably have proposed now, as he has had about fifteen years to think of it. No, I don't think he contemplates such a step, but his keeping Mrs. Gordon has always surprised us. In most things he is economical almost to meanness. Now, he must pay her a large salary, since out of it she clothes and educates her child; and to a man who neither entertains nor goes into society, I think a lady housekeeper rather a superfluity. However, her presence at the Court will make things far more cheerful for you."

In her heart of hearts Ruby doubted this.

"She will look on me as an interloper."

"Impossible, since you have far more claim on the Squire than she has. Besides, Ruby, don't misunderstand her position; she is simply a lady housekeeper. Mr. Norton keeps all real authority in his own hands. Why," and here the old lady smiled, "the last time my husband was at Norton, he had to go to bed in the dark because the household stock of candles was exhausted, and no one would venture to arouse the Squire, who had gone to bed and kept the key of the store closet in his possession."

Ruby's eyes grew scared.

"I shall not like that!" she said, simply.

"Don't laugh at me, but I am horribly frightened of the dark."

"It is not likely to occur again, but we will pack a box of candles in one of your trunks to secure against emergencies. I only told you to show how very small Mrs. Gordon's power really is."

"I hope she will like me."

"Don't anticipate troubles," said her kind old hostess, "and, remember, whenever you feel dull, and tired of the Court, you must come to us on a little visit. I have no daughters of my own left now, and it will do one good to have a young girl about the place."

"Are they dead?" asked Ruby, gently.

"Dead, no dear!" smiled Mrs. Dyason.

"They are all three well and happy; but one is the wife of a missionary in the wilds of Africa, another with her husband in India, and the youngest of all has married a Devonshire farmer, who is never happy away from his fields, and always wretched without his wife; so, though they all three send me pleasant, chatty letters, I am not far wrong in saying I have no daughters left. My eldest son married young, and his wife is quite taken up with a large family, so she has not much time to spare. I tell Tom he ought to find a wife if only that his father and I may have a daughter again, but he doesn't seem to think of such a thing."

Ruby was to spend a day and a night with the hospitable Dyasons, and long before the first was over she felt perfectly at home. If only Mrs. Gordon could be anything like her dear old hostess, or her uncle half so nice as

his lawyer, Ruby felt she could be very happy.

She did not see Tom till just before dinner, when she went down to the drawing-room, and found him its only tenant.

"Are you rested?" he asked, kindly. "I think you look less tired!"

"I am not tired a bit," replied Ruby; "but I am terribly frightened!"

"Who has ventured to alarm you?"

"No one here. But, oh! Mr. Dyason, I feel ready to sink whenever I think about to-morrow!"

"Then don't think of it," enjoined Tom, gravely. "And, remember, Miss Norton, my mother has always a home here for you when you get tired of the rural delights of Norton Combe."

"How good she is! I feel at home with her already!"

He looked pleased.

"That's all right. Then you will not look back on your first day in England with feelings of distaste."

"Oh, no; I have been so happy! Mr. Dyason, I think I must be the most heartless creature in the world!"

"I think not," he said, with praiseworthy gravity. "But what makes you fancy so?"

"Because I have been happy."

"Is that a crime?"

"It is only about a week since my father died; and only this morning that I said good-bye to Deborah. Why, I ought to have been perfectly miserable!"

"Nonsense!" said Tom Dyason, firmly. "Why should a child like you be miserable?"

"I am not a child!"

"Then why should a young person of the great age of nineteen and a half be unhappy? Granted it is only a few days since your father died. Did he ever treat you in a way to merit filial love and regret? While, as for your kind old nurse, you know you will see her very soon again!"

"I hope so."

"It will be quite easy," said Tom, confidently. "Even supposing your uncle had a crotchet against it, he does not own more than half the cottages in Norton Combe, and so many people have left the village for the new market town since the railway came there, that there is more lack of inhabitants than of houses for them."

"Then is there no railway at Norton Combe?"

"Nothing nearer than Combe Magnus, seven miles off, and nine from the Court itself. If you are fond of shopping, Miss Norton, it would be advisable for you to make your purchases before you leave us."

"Aren't there any shops at Norton Combe?"

"A sweet-stuff shop, and a post-office, and a kind of general emporium that tries to sell everything, and is always out of whatever you want. That's all, I think. There are some very good shops at Combe Magnus, though; and I suppose the Squire keeps a carriage, so the nine miles won't be a difficulty."

Ruby thought of the little "appartement" she had so lately left, and sighed. She began to understand life in a lonely country house would be very different from being within a few minutes' walk of the most fashionable streets in Europe.

They sat up a little while discussing her after she had gone to bed, this kindly, prosperous family, into whose midst Ruby had strayed like some wandering little lost sheep.

The old lawyer seemed charmed with her beauty, and said at once what a sensation she would make if she were presented at Court.

His wife sighed.

"I don't think the Squire likely to launch into expense even for so beautiful a creature as Ruby; and, since she is not destined for a fashionable career, I almost found it in my heart to wish she had been less attractive."

"Mother!" cried Tom, almost reproachfully.

"She is so like her mother!" said Mrs. Dyason, half apologetically. "And if it strikes even us, do you suppose it will escape the Squire?"

"What will it matter?" said Tom, simply. "Miss Jane was a lady. I can just recollect her, and how sweet she used to look. Why should the Squire object to Ruby taking after her own mother? Far better, surely, than that she should resemble her scapegrace of a father?"

"Don't you know?" said the lawyer, drily. "Well, you can keep a secret, I know, Tom, and remember this poor child must never hear a word of it. Her resemblance to her mother will be no passport to John Norton's favour, because he loved Vera Jane passionately, with a fervour that was akin to madness. His whole character changed when she—his promised wife, their wedding-day fixed—fled from her father's house with his brother!"

Tom Dyason stared. The Norton family annals had been a mystery to him. He had always fancied they held some dark secret, but he was not prepared for this.

"Poor man!"

"It embittered his whole life," said Mr. Dyason, gravely. "He had been a good husband to his first wife, though he never loved her, but he just worshipped the ground Miss Fane walked on."

"And she deceived him?"

"She was cruelly tempted," put in Mrs. Dyason. "James Norton was the most fascinating and engaging man about town. He went in his regiment by the name of the 'irresistible,' while his brother seemed years older than his age, and was of a shy, gloomy disposition. I could never blame her for choosing James; the pity of it was she had not courage to speak out and tell her brother the truth. I am sure, from her manner, Ruby has no idea of the history. I had half fancied her old nurse might have told her."

"And this accounts for the Squire's point-blank refusal to have Mrs. Charles at the Court?"

"I expect so."

"I hope he will be good to her—Ruby, I mean," said the young man, thoughtfully. "After all, he loved her mother once, and Ruby, at least, has never sinned against him. Why should he not love her for his lost love's sake?"

"It would not be in human nature."

"Besides," said Mrs. Dyason, whose face echoed her husband's words, "the Squire has centred all his affections on Ira. I don't think it is in him to care about anyone else!"

"Did you tell the child about her cousin, Tom?" demanded his father.

"Not a word. I've a very good opinion of young Norton myself; but he's not a lady's man, and he's not at the Court for more than a week at a stretch from year's end to year's end. He will make no difference to Ruby."

"He might fall in love with her?"

"Match-making at seventy; oh, mother!" said her husband, laughing. "But there is no fear of such a thing. Ira Norton dislikes all women; besides, he was old enough at the time of Miss Fane's jilting his father to know the rights of it, and would hardly trust his happiness to her child."

"I don't suppose he heard anything about it," said Tom. "He's younger than I am, and I'm sure I never credited the Squire with a romance. Ira was such a delicate, miserable-looking child. He was kept shut up at his grandmother's in Cornwall till he was twelve years old, and by that time Miss Fane's elopement was a very old affair. No, I don't suppose he has so much as heard of his father's misfortunes; but, still, he's not likely to fall in love with his cousin. Mrs. Gordon will take care of that, I fancy."

"What in the world has she to do with it?"

"She's under forty, and Ira's turned thirty," replied Tom Dyason, laughing. "I don't often criticise a lady's conduct, but I've thought for some years that Mrs. Gordon never intended to leave Norton Court. She

has tried hard enough to win the Squire's affections lately; she has transferred her attentions to his son. Ira is just the kind of fellow, if he ever did marry, to be won by an adventurer. He'd fall in with her wishes just to save himself the trouble of defeating her plans."

"After all," said Mrs. Dyason, musingly, "Ruby is turned nineteen. In less than two years she will be free from her uncle's control."

"And penniless," said the lawyer, gravely. "Don't encourage her to offend him, my dear. Recollect, despite John Norton's profession of poverty, we know that a stroke of his pen would give that little girl enough to keep her in ease, and leave him none the poorer."

"She is sure to marry!"

"My dear, if you had ever stayed at Norton Court of late years you would not speak so positively. The Squire keeps no society. I don't suppose she will ever set eyes on an unmarried man except in church, and a courtship can't be carried on there very well!"

"I am quite sure Ruby will marry, and marry young," returned Mrs. Dyason. "It is written in her face!"

"Mother," cried Tom, laughing, "you are going too far. Perhaps, since faces are so very communicative, you will kindly look at mine, and tell me if I am to go early to the hymeneal altar?"

"Don't laugh, Tom," said the old lady, smiling. "Of course, men folk are different, but with a girl one can always tell. There's some one feels will never have anything but solitary lives, while others seem to have it just stamped on their face that they are to be the joy and pride of a good man's home."

"I hope he will be that," said the lawyer, thoughtfully. "Since you are so very sure, wife, that little Ruby's destiny is a husband, I hope, at least, he will be a good man. She has had experience enough of a bad one in her father, poor child!"

So the dear old lady, who had known nearly fifty years of happy wifehood, settled it in her own mind that Ruby Norton's destiny was matrimony!

CHAPTER II.

Ruby said good-bye to her new friends the next day with great regret. She felt as if she had known them for years instead of only twenty-four hours. It was a bitter frosty morning, and Mrs. Dyason, who was not very strong, could not face the elements to take Ruby to the Paddington terminus. Her husband had a business appointment, and so it came about that Tom once more constituted himself the young lady's guide and protector.

It is a good way from Bedford Square to Paddington, but Mr. Dyason, junior, found it none too far. He had a strange dislike to parting from this girl who had come so suddenly into his life, whose past had been so sad and lonely, and whose future, poor child seemed to hold but little joy.

"I hope your uncle will let you come and stay with us sometimes, Miss Norton," he said, earnestly, as they drove along. "My mother is fond of a young companion, and if the Squire will spare you to us in spring we will show you something of London."

Ruby's eyes filled with tears.

"I can't help it," she said, apologetically. "You are all so kind to me. Oh! I wish Mr. Dyason were my uncle instead of the Squire."

"The Squire is not bad at heart," said Tom, generously. "Glad as I should be had the fates sent me a little cousin, I must try and not prejudice you against your real venerable uncle. He is peculiar, I admit, but, indeed, he is not without good qualities, and—" he stopped, hardly knowing how to proceed without leading to a forbidden subject—"and he has known a great deal of trouble."

"I suppose he was very sorry when his wife died?" said Ruby, indifferently. "But that happened years ago—years before I was born."

"His trouble dates from before you were born, and, of course, he ought to have got

over it, but it has embittered his whole life. There is only one feeling left in his heart." "Love of money," she guessed, quickly. "Well, I confess he is fond of it, but I meant his affection for his son. He is devoted heart and soul to Ira. I believe he would lay down his life for him."

Ruby opened her eyes.

"You never told me I had a cousin."

"You see, he is so little at home, it will make hardly any difference to you, and—" "And he will doubtless look down on me because I am a poor relation. I had forgotten that."

"I meant nothing of the kind. I rather like Ira Norton myself. I have not seen much of him, but I have an impression you won't get on with him."

They were at the station now, and Tom busied himself in caring for Ruby's comfort. The corner of a first-class carriage, where the guard promised to see she had only the most unexceptionable companions, a basket of fruit, the little box of provisions his mother had provided opposite her, a novel, and quite a sheaf of newspapers, were but a few of his thoughts for her. Had she been a stray princess, instead of a poor little penniless orphan he could not have been more careful for her amusement.

"Good-bye," he said, taking her hand when the bell had rung, and the last moment arrived. "Remember, my mother expects to hear from you very soon, and we all hope it won't be long before you come to us. The Squire knows the time of the train's arrival, so he is sure to send for you. You have not to change at all. Combe Magnus is a few stations beyond Gloucester."

It was over. For the first time in her life Ruby was travelling alone to people she had never seen. Miss Norton had faced strangers often enough during her schooldays. She had been at nearly as many schools as she was years old, but then her father or Deborah had always taken her. The Captain, got up fastidiously in his best attire, looking the very pink of fashion, his very air silencing any fear of punctual payments that might arise in the breast of the Lady Principal chosen for his new victim, or Deborah in the black silk she kept laid up in lavender and Paisley shawl, which both reflected honour on the man who could boast such an irreproachable servant.

But now there was no one to introduce her to her new home. She must be her own champion. Ruby wondered a little anxiously whether anyone would have taken her for the niece of so grand a person as the Squire of Norton Combe.

Deborah had attended to the doctor's hint, and kept back three sovereigns from the little store for her child's purse, but every other penny had been laid out on her wardrobe, with the result that Ruby possessed more clothes than had ever before been her portion; and Mrs. Dyason taking her for a drive the previous afternoon, and finding she had no warm wraps, insisted on purchasing her a beautiful fur undercloak.

It covered Ruby's knees now—a garment any girl might have been proud of—the outside fine cashmere, heavily embroidered in black silk, the hood and lining of soft, grey squirrel.

Ruby liked to put out her hand and stroke the fur, it was so deliciously warm and cosy. Her dress, of course, was black, not trimmed with crepe (which Deborah regarded as sacred to Sundays and "evening" attire), but closely braided. It fitted like a glove, the narrow white frills at throat and wrist alone relieving its sombre hue.

For the rest, Ruby wore her hair combed high, and coiled round her shapely little head. She had no regular "fringe," but one or two soft fluffy curls strayed over her forehead.

Her hat was of black felt, finished by a little wing. It just rested on her hair, and did not hide her face. Very few would have passed the girl without a second glance. It was not only her beauty which struck the gazer, but a

sort of hidden power of reserved force in her expression.

An old artist once visiting the Captain, and who, though he had never made his mark, yet possessed the true artistic feeling, told his host "that little girl had the making of a heroine."

Norton smiled scornfully, and the painter declared he meant it. Ruby had a soul above mediocrity. She would be supremely happy or intensely miserable—something very good or desperately bad—for her there was no safe middle course.

It was a long journey, even though the train was a fast one as far as Gloucester, where it changed itself into a parliamentary.

Ruby read one of her novels, looked at the papers, devoured fruit and sandwiches with a healthy appetite, but still time passed slowly; and she was delighted when, just as they were leaving Gloucester, the door was flung open, and two ladies were bundled rather than assisted into the carriage by an officious porter.

The elder, who was stout and matronly, stumbled against the seat and knocked down one of Ruby's books. Replacing it with an apology, she made some harmless little remark about the coldness of the weather; and Ruby, who was longing to hear the sound of her own voice, responded with her pretty foreign grace.

The ice was broken, and the three were soon talking quite pleasantly together.

A rash act, perhaps, of Ruby to enter into conversation with strangers; but, as has been hinted before, she was a girl of quick impulses and prompt judgments. She usually made up her mind about people at the first meeting, and was seldom mistaken.

She seemed to know by the kind, motherly face, the simply proffered apology, that the elder of her companions was a good, true-hearted woman, while, as for the younger, anyone would have pitied her. She had flaxen hair and bright, blue eyes—a face of almost angelic sweetness; but she was hopelessly deformed. Not even the loose mantle, the hair worn childish fashion over her shoulders—could hide the terrible mishap back. Habit does to a measure blunt our feelings, and it is a mercy it does so.

Mrs. Lester never dreamed of thinking what a painful contrast her Blanche presented to the slight, graceful stranger.

Blanche did not guess that Ruby's heart ached for her, and her difference from other girls.

"My watch must have been slow," said Mrs. Lester, when she had recovered from her flurry. "I'm sure I thought we had plenty of time. You stayed too long in that music shop, Blanche." Then to Ruby, "Music is my daughter's greatest pleasure. She has played the organ in her father's church ever since she was fifteen; and there's no treat I can give her she cares for so much as a day in Gloucester, when she can hear the service at the cathedral, and go hunting about for new music afterwards."

The deformed girl smiled.

"You see, we have no good music shop in Combe Magnus. It is such a pity!"

"Oh, my dear!" said her mother. "Don't you speak against Combe. If you had known it twenty years ago you would acknowledge it had done wonders. Why, when I first came home you could see nothing but fields every way you looked. The church and vicarage were the only buildings in sight."

A strange instinct came to Ruby as Mrs. Lester was speaking. Her simple words told her own history. She was the wife of a country clergyman, and had "come home" twenty years ago. Perhaps it was the very vicarage where Ruby's mother had spent her youth! Perhaps these ladies lived in the very house, she seemed to know by heart just from Deborah's stories.

"Do you mean Combe Magnus?" she asked, a little wistfully. "Could you tell me if we are nearly there?"

"Nearly an hour off!" said Mrs. Lester. "Are you going to Combe, my dear?"

"I am to get out there," returned Ruby, simply, "but I am going to stay in Norton Combe!"

If she had said she was going to stay at the county asylum her hearers could not have looked more surprised.

Blanche was speechless, but Mrs. Lester was not apt to be silent on any occasion.

"I know Norton Combe very well. A pretty little village it is. My husband was vicar there for nearly a year before he went to Combe. Of course, Combe is more cheerful, but I remember being sorry to leave Norton. It was such a dear, peaceful little spot, and the clergyman before us, Mr. Fane, had done so much good. The people all looked up to him as if he had been their father. He's not forgotten even now, though he's been dead these twenty years."

"I am his granddaughter," said Ruby, quietly, "and I am going to stay with my uncle at Norton Court. I am so glad it is such a pretty village, for it will be my first English home. I was born abroad, and we have lived in France all my life."

"Vera Fane's child!" exclaimed Mrs. Lester, breathlessly. "Who would have thought it? And you are going to live at Norton Court?" Here the good lady shook her head ominously. "I'm afraid you'll have a very lonely life, my dear, but you must come over to us as often as you can. Blanche will always be glad to see you."

"Thank you," said Ruby, gratefully. "I shall be sure to come, and perhaps you will be able to come over and see me? I suppose you know my uncle well, as you have lived near him so long?"

Mrs. Lester looked bewildered.

"My dear," she said at last, in her frank, motherly way, "you mustn't ask me the reason, for I can't explain it, but Mr. Norton sees no one except just a few gentlemen. It's more than a dozen years since he came into the Court, and I'm sure a lady has never crossed the threshold since except Mrs. Gordon!"

"But is he so wicked?" asked poor Ruby.

Blanche smiled.

"You see, Miss Norton," she said, gently, "ladies very seldom do go to a house where there is no mistress. I suppose the Squire could have given dinner-parties, and let Mrs. Gordon act as hostess; but the truth is, he doesn't like ladies, or care about their society."

"He cares for no one's society," said Mrs. Lester, "unless it's Mrs. Gordon and his son's. The Squire was born at Norton Combe, and I suppose at one time he knew every family of standing within twenty miles; but, you see, he gave out, when he came home, that he paid no visits, and he kept to it."

"I suppose his friends got tired of calling, when he never called on them in return; and now, unless it's his lawyer from London, or Mr. Grey, the agent here, I don't think anyone passes through the lodge-gates from one year's end to another, unless it's the tradespeople or the doctor."

"How dreadful!" said Ruby. "What shall I do?"

"The Squire may change his habits," said Blanche, hopefully; "and I have heard it's such a beautiful house. If you don't mind being alone a good deal, you may be very happy."

"But I hate being alone," confessed Ruby.

"I dare say things will be better than you think," said Mrs. Lester, kindly. "If not, remember you will always find a welcome at Combe Vicarage. We are seven miles off, but if you can manage to get to us, we could always drive you home in our little pony carriage."

"How kind of you!"

"Not at all. Blanche and I shall be very glad of a new friend; besides, my dear, Mr.

Fane was very, very kind to my husband, and I know the Vicar would like to try and make his grandchild feel at home in Westshire. Don't think more than you can help of what we have told you. Even if you had not met us, you must have found it out for yourself, since the Squire's eccentric habits are so confirmed. I do not think he could change them suddenly, even if he wished it; and, my dear, may I say just one word of warning to you.

"You are young and trustful. Don't put too much confidence in Mrs. Gordon. I am not saying one word against her—indeed, I hardly know her; but don't make a confidante of her. It is difficult to say just what I mean. Don't let her come between your uncle and yourself. Say what you wish to say to the Squire himself; don't let Mrs. Gordon become in any way the medium of your intercourse."

The warning would have impressed Ruby in any case, but coming from this simple, good-natured woman, it did so very strongly.

No one could look at Mrs. Lester and suspect her of malice and prejudice.

"I shall remember."

"It seems cruel to make you suspicious," went on Mrs. Lester, "only you're so young, and girls don't think. You see, my dear, your father and the Squire were not on the best of terms. Mrs. Gordon may come to you with sympathy for his death—may seem to take his side in the quarrels; but don't be persuaded to trust her with anything you'd mind the whole world knowing. That's my advice to you."

There was no time for more. They were at Combe Magnus, a small rustic station, where a grave, but kind-faced clergyman came up to the carriage in search of his wife and Blanche.

Mrs. Lester said a word to him in a whisper, and then he handed Ruby on to the platform as tenderly as though she had been his own child, and, taking her hand, welcomed her warmly to Westshire. A little pony phaeton was waiting in the charge of a small boy. But the Lesters would not hear of leaving Ruby until they saw her under some protection, for it was getting late in the afternoon, and the short winter's day was closing in.

"Tozer" (that was the station-master's name) "declares there has been no message from the Court," said the Vicar to Ruby. "I think it would be better to send to the 'Golden Ram' for a fly. I would drive you myself in the pony carriage with pleasure, but, to tell you the truth, I am not a favourite at the Court, and I don't think it would be well for you to make your first appearance there under my escort."

Ruby thanked him, and was just going to agree to the fly from the "Golden Ram," when the station-master rushed up excitedly.

"The Squire's sent, after all, Mr. Lester. That's David Brown coming down the hill now. Can't be mistaken in him nor the horses neither."

The Vicar cast his eyes in the direction indicated, when Ruby could see nothing but a dim black speck, but probably he had longer sight, for he said, with a relieved air—

"Yes, there's no mistaking David. I am glad, Miss Norton, the Squire has remembered. It seems like an earnest of welcome; and now, as your reaching the Court is certain, we will leave you."

He shook hands with her warmly, and Blanche whispered a hope of soon meeting her again, but Mrs. Lester drew her nearer and pressed a motherly kiss on her cheek. The platform seemed very cold and lonely to Ruby when the little family party had driven off. She seemed to fancy to herself the bright cheerful home that awaited them, and to wonder if such a blessing as a real home would ever come to her.

She had almost forgotten the famous Mr. Brown when the stationmaster's voice roused her.

"David's here now, miss?"

She was not proud—at least, she had nothing of that inferior pride which insists on dainty

food, fine clothes, and aristocratic surroundings. She had thankfully accepted a lift in a farmer's cart before now, when she and Deborah had made some excursion a few miles out of Paris; but yet her heart sank at the sight of the vehicle before her. It had been good once; she was ready to admit that (and rightly, since it had been a present from the late Squire to his sister-in-law when she came to reside with him fifty years before), but years had left their mark on it, not so much wear as the ravages of time; and the neglect of the slightest repairs had brought the Norton "coach" (as David styled it) to such a pitch of dilapidation, that Ruby really doubted whether it was safe to enter it; but a very shabby man, dressed more as an ostler than a gentleman's servant, held open the door—her parcels were already inside—and there seemed nothing for it but to place herself opposite; while the polite Mr. Tozer, who was station-master, porter, and ticket collector, more kindly gave a helping hand with her two trunks.

The cushions were old, faded, and moth-eaten. There was that peculiar fusty odour which is more unpleasant than any dampness. One of the windows was broken, and the cold air came streaming in through the glassless pane; the other had no pulley, and could only be kept closed by a piece of rough string nailed first on to the frame and then to the woodwork below. The horses were so thin that Ruby began to fear her uncle's parsimony extended to the allowance of food doled out to his beasts and pensioners.

David himself might have been any age. In point of business he rivalled the horses, and his face had wrinkles enough for ninety; but there was a keenness about his small, ferret-like eyes which did not agree with the notion of extreme old age. He looked at Ruby dubiously.

"You be the Squire's niece?"

She thought if he meant to ask the question he did so rather late in the day, but she graciously assented, and in her turn inquired if her uncle was well.

"He never ails anything, he do'n't."

"How long will it take us to get to the Court?"

"About three hours."

"But I thought it was only nine miles?"

"It's uphill most of the way, and the horses they takes their time."

They most certainly did. Ruby had witnessed many a funeral, but never had she seen a procession of mourners move along at a slower pace. She could have walked faster easily; the horses literally crept along. Nor did it seem to the girl they were even invited to go quicker. Mr. Brown sat on the box with a pipe in his mouth, and the horses took their own pleasure.

At last Ruby could bear it no longer. Poking her head through the broken window she managed to attract David's attention.

"Can't you make them go quicker?" she cried, impatiently. "I am nearly frozen to death!"

"They mostly got at this pace," he returned.

"They're not young, poor brutes, either of them."

"But, surely," urged Ruby, bent on quicker progress, and yet not willing to pose as an oppressor of the brute creation, "surely if they went a little faster it would be better for them too. They must be cold creeping along at this rate?"

"They mostly takes their time," returned David; but perhaps an involuntary shiver from the young lady touched him and aroused his pity, for he suddenly put his pipe away and began whistling to the horses. It was not very efficacious, but it proved he was not quite heartless; and, as Ruby said afterwards, at any rate he just prevented the animals from going to sleep, and coming to a dead stop, with which catastrophe she had momentarily expected before her appeal to the old coachman.

Three hours! It was nearer four, since at the top of every hill the benevolent David insisted on a "rest for his beasts." It was not far off nine o'clock when at last the lumbering vehicle turned in through some rusty gates, which David had to dismount to open, and Ruby realised dimly she was at last within the grounds of Norton Court.

"Isn't there a lodgekeeper?" she asked, as David clambered back to his perch.

"Dead!" was the laconic reply.

"And the lodge?"

"Shut up!"

The avenue was long, and in summer-time one of the beauties of the place; but seen for the first time on a winter's night, it had something weird and dreary about it which made Ruby shiver.

The moon had risen now, and when a turn of the drive brought them in sight of the Court, its grave, soft rays bathed the old stone walls in a kind of silvery splendour.

It had been beautiful once, it was grand even now; but there was nothing homelike or warm and comforting about it.

Ruby had her full share of romance, and yet an ugly modern red-brick house, with a brass knocker, and a glow of firelight from every window, would have been a more welcome sight to her than this splendid mansion, which might have been tenanted only by the dead for all sign of life or occupation about it.

David got down, took hold of the two boxes in turn, and put them with a bang on the broad terrace. He placed Ruby's little parcels in a pile beside them, and as she sprang out gave the information—

"The bell's broken. You'd better hammer at that door with your knuckles till someone comes."

Ruby felt utterly deserted when her chariot and his lumbering vehicle departed for the stables. She longed to sit down on the nearest of her two trunks and begin to cry, but she had plenty of spirit. She would not let her uncle boast she had entered his house in tears.

Rousing all her courage and determination she pushed back the thought of the pleasant vicarage party, and that other happy home where she herself had been a guest the night before.

By mere force of will she hardened her heart against David's advice, only substituting the handle of her umbrella for her knuckles as the instrument with which to hammer at the door.

She made a tolerable amount of noise—at least it seemed to be a tremendous din; but, perhaps, everyone was a long way off; for some minutes elapsed before an old woman, with a very small piece of candle in a gigantic candlestick, at last opened the door (which resisted the act with various groans and scrapes), and inquired—

"Are you Miss Norton?"

Ruby confessed that she was. The old woman motioned her to enter, pulled in the luggage as though it had been a feather, and pointed to the stairs.

"You'd like to see your room? It's all ready."

This was gratifying, but at that moment warmth and food seemed more attractive to the young traveller than repose, and she was just about to say so when a third person joined them, and surprise stopped the words on her lips.

The newcomer was one of those women whose age it is always difficult to determine. Very small, yet just sufficient in stature to escape the name of dwarf or deformity. Very trim and natty in figure and attire, features on a scale to match the height; hair, eye-lashes, and complexion of the whity-brown type, with just sufficient brightness about the first to give you an idea that hair dye had been employed with a desire to produce a golden tint, which obstinately wouldn't come; pretty hands and feet; very white teeth, and small infinitesimally small grey eyes—not the

deep, tender grey we all admire—but that remarkable shade which has much in common with that of cat's eyes, and which detractors always call green.

Jane Gordon had been at Norton Court over fifteen years, counting the time she spent there under its last master's rule. For more than fifteen years she had lived in Norton Combe, and yet the people there always spoke of her as a stranger.

There were many who praised her devotion to John Norton's interests, many more who declared she had secret ends of her own to gain by remaining in his house; but, though she had admirers and enemies, the woman could not count in all Westshire one real friend outside the Court; and there was not a creature in the whole county who understood her, or even professed to understand her.

The first impression she made on Ruby was surprise, the second irritation.

Ruby was conscious she herself was tired and jaded. Her head ached intolerably; her hair was doubtless disordered, her dress dusty from her long journey. This woman, who ruled as mistress in Ruby's ancestral home, looked as spick and span as though he had come out of a band-box as though neither heat nor cold, joy nor sorrow, fatigue nor excitement, would have been able to detract in the slightest from the primness of her array. Her dress was grey, some soft woollen material, fitting her like a skin, and showing a figure almost girlish in its outlines. Her hair was very much dressed, so much so as to suggest some of the heavy plaits were hers by purchase, not by gift. The lace at her neck and sleeves was good, her watch chain was long and thick. One plain diamond keeper, besides a wedding-ring, and a small gold brooch, made up her stock of jewellery.

She went towards Ruby with outstretched hand.

"My dear child, I am so glad to see you! You must be frozen to death! Come in here. This is my own little sanctum."

It was a compromise between the boudoir of a lady of means and the "sitting-room" of a housekeeper or upper servant. It seemed as though comfort and use had been studied more than show, and yet the whole effect was pretty.

It was the most cheerful room at Norton Court, and yet before long Ruby grew to hate it more than all the others. To-night she felt nothing but a genial sense of warmth and repose as Mrs. Gordon placed her in a low chair by the fire, and told Priscilla to take the boxes upstairs, and then bring tea.

"For tea is nicest when one is off a journey, however late it is. Don't you think so?"

"I am very fond of tea!" replied Ruby. Then, looking Mrs. Gordon straight in the face, and recalling Mrs. Lester's warning, she asked—

"Is my uncle at home? Shall I not see him to-night?"

"He's at home," replied Mrs. Gordon, agreeably; "but he never cares to be disturbed in the evening. And, really, my dear girl, you can't be looking forward with any pleasant feeling to seeing him. Far better leave it till the morning, when you are rested."

"I would rather see him to-night if he will let me," persisted Ruby. "I shall sleep better if the meeting is over. I have been rather dreading it."

"Very natural, I am sure," guessed Mrs. Gordon. "Your uncle is not an easy man to get on with."

"You have been here a long while, haven't you?" said Ruby, quietly. "I suppose he is very fond of you?"

Mrs. Gordon simpered—

"I have a good deal of influence with him, but you need not be afraid, my dear. I shall always be on your side, I promise you."

Ruby's heart recoiled from the sense of the words.

"I don't see any question of sides," she returned. "While I live with my uncle I shall never oppose his will. It would not be right while I eat his bread."

Mrs. Gordon stared.

"I hope you don't go in for being religious?" she said, sharply. "Your uncle 'd never stand it."

"No; but religion must be a sham on the part of one brought up as you have been, and the Squire hates shams."

"So do I."

Priscilla came in now, with a loaf and some butter, a very small cup of tea, and a plate. She put the two first before her mistress and gave the others to Miss Norton.

"The Squire would like to see you to-night, miss, unless you're too tired," said the old woman.

"I will take you to him," said Mrs. Gordon, rising; but Priscilla evidently stood in no awe of the lady-housekeeper, for she rejoined, firmly—

"The master, he said Miss Norton was to go to him alone, and I was to show her the way."

The look on Mrs. Gordon's face was not good to see, but she tried to hide it by a forced smile.

"So very peculiar, dear man?"

"She's right enough there," said the old woman to Ruby, as they trudged along down a lengthy corridor. "The master is odd, but, bless you, miss, I'd rather put up with him than her any day. He's a Norton, after all, and they're a fine old family if they be a little queer."

It was Deborah's excuse for Ruby's father, only put in different words.

"I thought Mrs. Gordon was a Norton?" hazarded Ruby. "I'm sure someone said so."

Priscilla shook her head scornfully.

"Her husband was a far-off cousin to the last squire, but she hasn't a drop of Norton blood in her veins, nor much of any other kind either, I expect. I'm sure she looks like a threadpaper. No, no, missie, there's only two of the family left now, except the master, and that's you and Mr. Ira."

"Is he here now?"

"He hasn't been here for months. His father won't have him at the Court much, which seems a strange thing, seeing Mr. Ira is the light of his eyes. Now and again he'll come down for a day or two, but that's all."

"Then where does he live?"

"He doesn't live nowhere, miss; he just wanders about. I'm sure when I read in the Bible about Cain, who couldn't rest after murdering Abel, but was always wandering up and down, it put me just in mind of Mr. Ira, not that he killed his brother, for he never had one. But we mustn't talk now, missie, the library's at the end of the passage, and the Squire hates noise."

She drew a velvet curtain back and disclosed a door so fitted with revolving springs as to open noiselessly, and close of its own accord. Priscilla drew back after the young lady had entered; the door at once closed, and Ruby found herself alone in the presence of her much-feared uncle.

The library was a long, lofty room, so spacious that the solitary candle only lighted up the small writing-table, which it made resemble a tiny patch of brightness surrounded on all sides by a vast darkness.

Half stumbling in the unaccustomed shadowy light, Ruby advanced to the table.

John Norton sat at it with a book before him, but he was not reading; he kept his eyes fixed on the book, however, so that Ruby had full chance of observing him unperceived.

She saw a man, so old and worn-looking, it seemed impossible he could be the twin brother of her father, who, even to the last, retained his military, dashing air, and wore his fifty odd years so lightly. John Norton might have passed for seventy or even eighty. His form was bent with much stooping, his

thin hair was perfectly white. He wore a black velvet skull-cap, which added to his weird appearance; a faded dressing-gown and slippers, much the worse for wear, completed his attire. His hands were so thin that the long fingers looked almost like claws. He looked up suddenly as Ruby finished these observations, and she made two discoveries. There was nothing evil or sinister in the eyes that met hers, and he was quite as much agitated as herself.

"Sit down," he said in a sharp, rather querulous voice. "Sit down close; I want to look at you!"

Hardly an encouraging reception; but Ruby had one thing in her favour, she was not in the least shy or timid. She drew a chair up to the table, and sat down opposite the Squire.

"What's your name—Florence?"

"Oh, no!"

"It ought to have been! Your father hadn't much heart, but he might have remembered the mother whose idol he was."

"My mother chose my name," said the girl a little defiantly. "I have heard my old nurse say she called me Ruby to show that however other people despised me for not being a boy, to her I was precious."

"Why?" echoed the old man scornfully, "you might as well be called Emerald."

"I shouldn't like that," confessed Ruby. "I am quite satisfied with my name as it is!"

"And perhaps you're satisfied with yourself, and your father, and every thing belonging to you?"

Ruby's eyes flashed.

"My father's dead," she said bravely, and can't defend himself. I used to think hardly enough of him while he was alive, but I'll not listen to a word against him now he's gone."

"You've got some spirit, I see. I thought French girls were namby-pamby things who just waited in a convent till they found a husband!"

Ruby laughed in spite of herself.

"I'm not French, and I never was in a convent in my life!"

"Do you mean you have not been educated?"

"I can read and write," said the girl, demurely, "and some people like my singing. Of course, I can speak French, but I'm afraid that's the list of my accomplishments. I changed schools so often I hadn't time to learn any more, and I left for good when I was sixteen."

"And how old are you now, but I needn't ask. It is more than twenty years since your father married. I suppose you are nineteen?"

"And a half."

"And you have never been to England before?"

"Never!"

"Do you know anyone in it?"

"Oh dear, yes; lots of people!"

The Squire's face grew as black as night.

"I had no idea your acquaintance was so extensive. Pray why did not your father bequeath you to one of these 'lots of people,' instead of leaving you an additional burden on a poor man like me?"

Ruby grew scarlet.

"I wanted not to come when I heard you were so poor," she said frankly; "but the Darbys said I must till I was twenty-one, and I don't suppose father ever heard of the people I know in England!"

"Clandestine acquaintances?"

"Not a bit; but you see I have been to fifteen schools."

The Squire started.

"And there was generally one English girl, or even more, at each. Of course, I know all these. Then there is my old nurse, and Mr. Dyason and all his family. That, surely, makes nearly thirty. I call thirty lots!"

"You can't have a heap of school-girls here!"

"I don't want to. I am not very fond of school-girls."
 "And, remember, child, I am a poor man—a very poor man. I pay my way, but that's all!"

"So you said in your letter!"

He eyed her keenly.

"Perhaps people have told you I am rich; but it's a mistake—a great mistake. I'm miserably poor."

"I'm sorry!" confessed Ruby, "because I have a dreadfully large appetite, and it's bad to be hungry; but, perhaps I shall get used to it."

The Squire thawed.

"I daresay we can find you enough to eat; but it will be plain fare—very plain. What do you think of Jane Gordon?"

The last sentence was so sudden it nearly took Ruby's breath away.

"Answer me!" said the Squire, imperatively. "Don't keep me waiting while you invent some subterfuge. Give me a plain answer to a plain question. What do you think of Jane Gordon?"

"I can't bear her!"

He looked surprised.

"Why?"

"I don't know!"

"And pray are you in the habit of taking sudden dislikes to people without reason?"

"It is your fault if you are vexed," retorted Ruby. "You said I was to give you a plain answer."

"Well, as it happens, your dislike suits me. Jane is a very useful woman—a very useful woman. The servants would eat me out of house and home with their extravagance if she went away. I can't afford to send her off; but I don't want you two to be friends."

"I don't feel like it!" said Ruby, slowly; "but I suppose we shall be a good deal thrown together, living in the same house."

"I'll see to that!" Then, with another of his strange changes of subject, "Where's Deborah Charles?"

"At Dover."

"She understands she's not to come here?"

"She has no wish to come to the Court. She thinks of settling in Norton Combe."

"She had better keep out of my way."

"Deborah is the best woman in the world, and the truest. Don't you like her?"

"I hate her!"

"It seems to me," said Ruby, "you hate a great many people. How has Deborah injured you?"

He peered at her curiously.

"Speak the truth, girl. What has she told you about me?"

"I never heard your name till my father was dying. Then he spoke against you."

"People generally do speak against those they have injured. Well? Go on."

"I asked Deborah afterwards if you were really such a bad man, and she said she never liked you; but she would say this for you, you were a good son and an excellent husband. She thought some trouble (my aunt's death, I fancy she meant) had embittered your whole life; but, if it had softened you, and made you different, she thought you might be kind to me after all."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing."

"You can go now," said the Squire, coldly. "Don't come here unless I send for you. You can walk about wherever you please, but you are not to get intimate with Mrs. Gordon; and, remember, I won't have a party of fools gathered here."

"I don't want to gather anyone here. If I am not to see you again for some time, there are two or three things I want settled."

"I can't give you any money."

"I don't want any. I suppose when Deborah comes to the village I can go and see her?"

"Yes; but she is not to come here."

"And I met some people in the train—

Lester the name was—who live at Combe Magnus. Can I go and see them?"

"If you like to walk. Is that all?"

"Yes," said Ruby, laconically. "That's all."

She turned towards the door.

He had spoken no word of welcome; had not even touched her hand; but, as she was leaving him, he faced round suddenly.

"Stop!"

Spellbound, she obeyed him, wondering what new thought had struck him.

"You said just now you always spoke the truth," began the Squire. Did you mean it?"

"Of course," said Ruby, indignantly. "I don't profess to be good, or even very nice. I have quite as many faults as other girls, but deceit isn't among them. I like to speak my mind. If the truth offends people, as it did you just now, I can't help it. I'm afraid I rather like it!"

"Hem!" said the old man, thoughtfully. "I'm inclined to believe you. You seem a strange sort of girl, but you're too outspoken to be deceitful, so just tell me this—are you in love?"

"Good gracious, no!" said Ruby, with a burst of genuine girlish laughter. "Why, I never knew a young man to be really friendly with; I mean, till I met young Mr. Dyason. Of course, papa had visitors to see him, and I had to meet them sometimes, but we never talked—Deborah was so careful. Besides, they were nearly all old, and foreigners, and I never thought of such a thing."

Lie Squire looked at her keenly.

"But I suppose you know you're pretty?"

"Deborah always said so; and when he was dying, father told me my face was my fortune."

"But yet you never thought of falling in love?"

"Never! You see," said Ruby, frankly, "people in love go through such heaps of troubles. In novels, even, there is nothing but misery after once the heroine has met the hero!"

The Squire grunted.

"And young Dyason," he demanded.

"Perhaps you thought him a nice young fellow?"

"That I did," admitted Ruby, frankly. "I told him I wished his father had been my uncle instead of you, that I could have lived with them; and he could have been a brother to me."

She found Mrs. Gordon very friendly on her return to the pink room, as the housekeeper's sanctum was called.

"I see the Squire must have taken a fancy to you," said the widow, with a gasp, "or he would never have kept you with him so long. What did you think of him?"

"I think he is a very inquisitive old man," said Ruby, gravely. "And very unkind to keep me so long from my tea and bread and butter!"

Mrs. Gordon volunteered to send for a fresh cup, hot and strong, from the kitchen, and Ruby graciously accepted; but she did not wax communicative over the repast, and as soon as it was over she declared she was tired, and wished to go to bed.

"Your rooms are quite ready," said Jane.

"How many am I expected to inhabit?" inquired Ruby, in surprise.

"There are two prepared for you. It is the one thing the Squire is lavish in—house room. You see, in a big rambling place like this it costs nothing; and you will find them warm, too. There is a coal mine on the property, and so there is no stint of fuel."

Ruby felt glad to hear it, and began to think the Squire could not be so mean as had been represented. As though Mrs. Gordon had divined the thought, she added,—

"It costs him nothing. The mine is leased to some company. The agreement was drawn years before your uncle came into the property, and there is a clause in it that so many tons—

I forget the number—of coal should be delivered at the Court, free of charge, every year.

"He can't sell it, for I'm would object, and as even the enormous cellars here would grow full to overflowing if we didn't burn a good deal, we all revel in fires. Even Priscilla has one at night."

The rooms pleased Ruby, even while they impressed her with a feeling of loneliness. They were scrupulously clean, and a bright fire burnt in each; but the furniture was old and rickety, the carpets threadbare, and the very ceiling discoloured by time.

Either of the two chambers would have contained the four rooms which comprised James Norton's "appartement" in Paris, and yet had space to spare.

They were, in fact, so large that poor Ruby felt as though her possessions, when unpacked, would resemble a very small gipsy encampment on a very vast common, but above all other sensations was a desire to get rid of Mrs. Gordon.

She yawned without an attempt at concealment, and the widow, taking the hint, said good-night, and left Ruby to her own desires.

It was half-past ten. The watch that Deborah had pinched and pinched to be able to give her darling when she left school recorded the fact.

The piece of candle on the table was so tiny that Ruby promptly extinguished it, resolved to do with firelight for her meditation, and save the precious article till she began the real business of undressing.

She tried to think out her position, and understand, if she could, the life that lay before her, but the problem was beyond her.

Her father's dying words had proclaimed his brother a bad man. She fancied her old nurse shared the opinion; but she herself did not feel as though her uncle were wicked so much as peculiar.

He had been abrupt, harsh, cold even in his words and manner to herself, but she could not say that he had been absolutely unkind.

It was evidently a craze with him that he was very poor; but he had expressed no wish to feed her on bread and water, or clothe her in sackcloth.

His tone had been bitter in speaking of her father, but not half so malicious as the dead man's words of him.

It would be a dreary life, with little to brighten it, no doubt; but it seemed to Ruby she could have faced it bravely but for one drawback, and that drawback was Mrs. Gordon.

Strange that she did not fear her uncle, who by her father's will had had supreme power over her for the next eighteen months—who that father had warned her would be her enemy, and yet felt terrified of a woman who could have no authority over her—who was simply the Squire's housekeeper, and whom he himself did not wish to interfere with his niece.

The terror might seem childish and absurd, but none the less it was real and genuine.

Ruby's last waking thoughts were a dread of the sleek, smooth-spoken woman; and in her first sleep she dreamed that Mrs. Gordon stood over her with a dagger, only that before she could inflict the fatal wound it was wrested from her hands by a young man whose face Ruby could not see, and whose very voice seemed strange to her.

[The second and concluding part of this intensely interesting *Novellette* will appear next week.]

In a Perthshire parish a young woman went to join the church. She had never been to school, and could not say the shorter catechism. The first question the minister asked was: "Can you tell me who brought you out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage?" Her reply was: "Weel, sir, that's just the way I've spread, for I never was over the Brig of Cally in my life."

Gleanings

Lots of promises have strings tied to them.
The bill collector is seldom out of a job.

A WOMAN never puts off till to-morrow what she can wear to-day.

PEOPLE who say just what they think are more numerous than popular.

AS A PRECAUTION.—Most of the railway stations in Russia are about two miles from the towns which they respectively serve. This is a precaution against fire, as many of the Russian dwellings are thatched with straw.

IN FAVOUR OF WOMEN.—In the Philippines the marriage laws are all in favour of women, and with her it is a clear case of "What is yours is mine, and what is mine is my own." She adds her husband's name to hers, and the children take the name of both.

BURIED TOWNS.—Italy is not the only country that can boast of its buried towns and villages, says the "People's Friend." In Scotland there are the Culbin Sands, covering a large tract of country, under which many dwellings lie entombed; while in Ireland there is the ancient town of Bannock, situated in a once fertile tract between Wexford and Waterford, as effectually covered with sand as ever Pompeii was with red-hot cinders or Herculaneum with lava.

NOT IN FAVOUR.—Even in the warmest weather the shirt waist man is not numerous. He never will be. Why? He is a pocket-wearing animal. Woman, of course, is not. Hence she is handicapped in nearly every calling. She will go about content with one hand occupied in hanging on to a purse or reticule and the other clutching frantically at her skirts, and yet wonder why she is not a commercial success. Man will give up drink—sometimes—and cigars and theatres, but he cannot give up pockets. And this is why the masculine shirt waist can never meet with general favour. It doesn't have pockets.

LITERALLY BROKEN.—No man ever dies of a broken heart in his love affairs, according to both Shakespeare and Thackeray; the heart, however, does physically break, either from sudden shock or from overstrain. A captain on a vessel who had set out to marry a lady, on reaching his destination was abruptly informed that she had married, and the man fell to the ground and expired. The heart was discovered to be literally rent into two pieces. Again, an instance is on record of a boy, very strong and healthy, who, in attempting to raise a sheaf of corn, fell dead in the effort. In this instance the post-mortem disclosed a large rent in the heart. The sudden propulsion of blood upon the left ventricle, which is the hardest worked portion of the heart, and where the rupture generally takes place, forces the tissues asunder.

THE MOON KEPT ON SHINING.—A certain well-known judge was once violently attacked by a young and very impudent counsel. To the surprise of everybody, the judge heard him quite through, unconscious of what was said by those present, and made no reply. After the adjournment for the day, and when all were assembled at the hotel where the judge and many of the court folk had their refreshments, one of the company asked the judge why he did not rebuke the impertinent fellow. "Permit me," said the judge, loud enough to attract the attention of the whole company, among whom was the barrister in question—"permit me to tell you a little story. My father, when we lived in the country, had a dog, a mere puppy, I may say. Well, this puppy would go out every moonlight night and bark at the moon for hours together." The judge paused, as if he had finished. "Well, what of it?" exclaimed half a dozen of the audience at once. "Oh, nothing—nothing; but the moon kept on shining, just as if nothing had happened."

A FOOL may be funny, but that does not indicate that he is possessed of wit.

WOMAN was created from a rib, and has been a bone of contention ever since.

EVEN after a woman loses her head she worries about what hats she shall wear.

THERE are none who hate us so strenuously as those to whom we have been most kind.

A DELICATE OPERATION.—The plucking of ostrich feathers is a very delicate task. At the proper season a man carefully examines the flock, and picks out those birds whose feathers are ripening, groups them into dozens, and pens them in, so that they cannot run about and injure their beautiful plumage. When the plucking time comes the bird is enticed into a narrow, dark passage-way. The entrances are then closed and the bird thus imprisoned. A cloth bag is thrown over the creature's head. Then the plucking begins. Three men, perched upon platforms without the pen, reach over the board inclosure, and with curious scissor-like appliances pluck off the feathers. Whatever wounds a bird may receive are immediately dressed. The tail feathers are pulled and not cut, simply because they reproduce better than other feathers of the ostrich. While the plucking is in progress the ostrich keeps up a dismal roaring. Were it not for the staunch construction of the pen the creature would kick the boards into splinters.

TOLD BY A POST OFFICE CLERK.—Many persons write letters that they forget to sign. People come to us every day with such letters, in the hope that they may be able to trace the writers. Sometimes we can do so, but not often. Of course, only a small percentage of such letters are brought to our attention, so the total number must be very large. If the name of the writer is on the envelope or letter-head the lack of a signature is of less consequence. But it happens frequently that important letters cannot be traced to the writers. A certain business house brought in a letter one day minus the signature, and containing a five pound note to pay for certain goods ordered. It came from a village in the Midlands, and it was sent to the postmaster of the place, with the request that he ascertain the name of the writer, if possible. He failed to do so, and the matter rested for some time. One day we received a letter from the same town asking us as to the reliability of the firm to which the letter had been written, saying that the writer had sent the firm money for an order of goods, and had received no reply. It turned out to be the person we were in search of, and the mistake was explained. But this was an exceptional case.

THREE MILES FROM ALLOA.—About three miles from Alloa, on the main road to Stirling, the traveller may notice on the footpath a small round hole such as boys use for playing marbles in. About this hole a strange story is told, a story not only strange, but true, as can be vouched for by an old Alloa resident. A great many years ago, while the road was being repaired, a young ploughboy leading his horses trampled down the newly cut edging of the footpath. When remonstrated with by the road-mender he retorted pettily, as boys are apt to do. In a fit of passion the labourer lifted his spade and struck the boy on the head, killing him instantly. The body lay for some time, and where the head rested a pool of blood was formed, which evaporated very quickly and left behind it a hole, the identical hole which we mentioned above. Now comes the peculiar part of the story. Within the last forty years the hole has been filled up hundreds of times, sometimes the footpath is completely covered with "danders," yet the hole has not been filled up many hours before it is emptied again. As a schoolboy, the writer, along with other boys, has filled it up often, and returned a few hours later to find it empty. Yet the mystery has never been explained, and the hole remains to this day.

STOPPING BLEEDING OF THE NOSE.—Spirits of turpentine in a hot saucer will give off fumes which, stuffed up the nose, often have a good effect in stopping bleeding. Tying a string or bandage around the thigh or the arm close to the shoulder is of service. An excellent remedy is to let the patient have a hot foot bath. This is one of the best possible measures from its simplicity, and it rarely fails in all ordinary cases to stop the bleeding; another method is to apply a large mustard leaf or mustard plaster to skin over the right side of the body in the situation of the liver.

WRINKLES.—A heavy broom should always be selected in preference to a light one for thoroughly sweeping, as the weight aids in the process.

Do you know that rubbing the neck with lemon juice will remove the dark line and rough appearance caused by wearing high collars?

A good wrinkle for mending a hole in an umbrella is to stick on very firmly black court plaster inside of the umbrella. This is not so much seen as a darn.

When making tea, if the kettle should have boiled, pour a cup of cold water in and let it boil up again before making, and you will find the tea will be as nice again.

Mildew stains can be removed by rubbing plenty of soap and powdered chalk on the garment and placing it in the sun. It may be necessary to repeat this operation.

STRENGTHENING ROPES.—The plan has been proposed by a competent authority in such matters that, in order to ensure greater strength and consequently more safety in ropes used for scaffolding purposes—particularly in those localities where the atmosphere proves destructive of hemp fibre—such ropes should be dipped when dry into a bath containing twenty grains of sulphate of copper per litre of water, and allowed to soak in this solution some four days. By pursuing this method, which is claimed to be much more practicable and effective than any other yet resorted to for this purpose, it is found that the ropes will thus have absorbed a certain quantity of sulphate of copper, which will preserve them for some time both from the attacks of animal parasites and from rot.

TO SEAL A LETTER.—An alcohol lamp, or a roll of the wax taper sold for the purpose, and still air in the room are requisite to the proper sealing of letters. With the seal and envelope before you, turn one end of the stick of wax rapidly over the flame, not near enough to ignite it, until it is creamy and ready to drop, then deftly rub it round and round over the point of the envelope flap until enough is deposited, when the dab of wax may be held a moment immediately over the flame. Then firmly press the seal into it. If a drop of the hot wax is first placed under the point of the flap, the seal will be less likely to break. A well-cut seal will never stick, and practice will ensure a firm impression with the wax moulded neatly and evenly around the seal. Any stationer can supply you with the materials.

SILENCE YOU CAN SEE.—Absolute silence is an impossibility. Silence, as we understand it, simply means that there are sounds too delicate or too loud for the ear to register. In other words, when we can't hear anything we call that condition "silence." But wherever you are there are sounds around you. Even in the deepest mine the air vibrates and makes a sound. An instrument has been invented that will catch these sounds and permit of the vibrations being represented pictorially on a screen, and in that way you may see silence and properly understand what it means. By comparing the pictures of noises with those of that condition of things known as silence we gain an idea of the difference between a noisy night, for instance, and one when "absolute silence reigns," as the novelist puts it. It is rather surprising to find so much disturbance at the time when everything appears to be perfectly quiet.

HER MISTAKE

By EFFIE ADELAIDE ROWLANDS.

Author of "The Flower of Fate," "Woman Against Woman," etc., etc.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Sir William Carruthers has married a second time a woman of means, but lacking that unconscious refinement and indefinable something that money can never give. She has a daughter, Brenda Grant, and it is early apparent that the introduction of this young lady into the household at Thickthorn bodes no good for the beautiful and sympathetic Hope Carruthers, Sir William's daughter by his first wife. On the day the story opens a young man has met with a serious accident in the hunting field. A stranger, he is brought to Thickthorn, and before the night is out is in the throes of delirium tremens. The Earl of Hampshire dies suddenly, and by his will his fortune goes to Hope Carruthers. Hugh Christie, hearing of Hope's good luck, decides at once to ask her to be his wife. Philip Leicester, the stranger, is making slow progress towards recovery, and finds much solace and comfort in Hope's society. Meanwhile preparations are going forward for the marriage, and Hugh Christie is as dutiful as a lover should be. Brenda Grant, disappointed at Hugh proposing to Hope, has left Thickthorn, and her absence really bodes no good for the happiness of the heroine.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FEW days after the De Quincy ball Meckrington was plunged into terrible trouble and disaster. Hope was driving into town one afternoon, and as she approached the grimy neighbourhood she became conscious that there was something very wrong.

Groups of people were clustered together at the street corners, and dozens were hurrying to and fro with agitation and alarm on their faces.

Hope drew up her pony and questioned some women who were talking away in the broad dialect of the county.

Her heart contracted as she heard their answer.

"Another explosion!" she repeated. "How terrible. Oh! poor things! poor things!"

She drove on, her eyes full of tears. She felt she would have liked to comfort every weeping woman she saw rushing wildly to the pit's mouth to know the worst, perhaps to receive charred and blackened remains of husband, brother, or son.

Meckrington was at all times an unlovely spot, but this afternoon it seemed ghastly to Hope.

She alighted from her carriage at the station, and walked in the direction of Philip's house. She knew he would not be there, but she would get the latest and most coherent news from his housekeeper, Rachel.

There was a sort of nervous thrill of apprehension in her heart as she walked, and all at once there came upon her a craving to see Philip.

She had dwelt much on the memory of his exquisite kindness and delicacy to her at the ball, and she had reproached herself in that she had scarcely thanked him for all he had done for her.

It had been partly this that had actuated her in driving to Meckrington. There were one or two things she wished to discuss with him, though a letter would have done just as well; but she had made it an object for seeing him, as she desired that he should know how sincerely she appreciated his tender thought for her.

She knocked lightly at his door, and was admitted by the neat handmaiden who assisted Rachel. From her Hope learned that Mr. Leicester was down at the pit's mouth, and that Rachel had gone to give her help also.

"I will wait a little while," Hope said, and she went into his room.

A curious sort of feeling came over her as she walked through the room. She had been here several times before, but never alone, and the individuality and character of the owner had not been so clearly forced upon her.

She picked up some gloves he had flung down, and held them in her hand. The mere contact of anything he had touched seemed to give her pleasure.

There was a rough, unstudied grace about the room. It was essentially a man's apartment, yet little touches here and there seemed to speak the warmth, and almost womanly tenderness, in the man's nature.

A basket lay close to the fire, and Hope, looking down, saw three or four tiny puppies moving aimlessly about in it. The mother, a nondescript creature, of no birth and no breed, hovered about them, but turned away ever and anon and ran to the window with a whine to look for her master.

In a large cage, clean and sand-sprinkled, there hobbled about a jackdaw with one slender leg bound to a narrow bit of stick, and a general air of convalescence.

Hope remembered to have heard something about the bird with the broken leg from Dolly. A scent of tobacco smoke clung about the room, and half-a-dozen pipes were tossed together on the mantel shelf, while away close to the window was a little vase full of violets, as a whisper that spring was near at hand.

Hope put down the glove she held and moved about, looking at the pictures the Squire had sent down to "the lad," and her eyes filled with tears as she gazed at a photograph of her own boy standing in a place of honour on the writing-table.

She bent and patted the dog, who was making friendly overtures to her, and then she loosened her cloak and sat down in a big chair. There was a distinct pleasure to her in being in this room, and yet her heart beat in a quick, nervous sort of way that was wholly incomprehensible to her.

The door opening made her look round, the rich colour mantling her cheeks.

It was the little servant with some tea.

Hope thanked her in her own pretty way, and asked some questions about the accident.

"I suppose you do not know when Rachel will come in?"

"She is sure not to be long, for master will dine early to-night, my lady," the girl said, with a curtsy. To her everybody who came from Blairton must be a ladyship, and Hope seemed like a princess in her beautiful furs, with the diamonds glittering on her small, ungloved hands.

"You make delicious tea," Hope said, with a smile. "I am sorry Mr. Leicester is not here to—"

"Deed, yes, my lady; he maun be fair clammed. He've took no food for hours less he gotten any down yonder."

"He went out so early?" Hope said, hurriedly. All at once a sort of presentiment seized her—a presentiment of evil to this man.

"Master been gone sin arter breakfast, my lady."

Hope put her cup down.

"And—the explosion took place about noon," she said to herself.

She felt cold all over, and her hand shook. Suddenly the gate clanged, and she heard Rachel's voice outside.

The little maid hastened to admit the housekeeper, and Hope's heart stood still again as she heard Rachel inquire if Philip had come in.

She walked to the doorway.

"Mr. Leicester is not here, Rachel," she said, as calmly as she could. "What is wrong? Is it very—very bad? Can—can—"

"Oh! Mrs. Christie, ma'am, I'm sore troubled. Mr. Leicester—they do not know. I have been at the mouth for the last two

hours. Such a sight, ma'am; it has nearly killed me! He has not been there; some of 'em say they saw him ride through the town, others—"

"Others!" Hope repeated, mechanically, her hand going out to the doorway. The woman's white agitated face and dishevelled look oppressed her. "Come in—sit—down. You are worn out. You must have some brandy."

She held the housekeeper's worn hand in her delicate ones, while the little maid fled to get the brandy.

"Oh! ma'am, forgive me," Rachel said, humbly, brokenly; "but I'm sick at heart, and full of dread. He is so good, ma'am, I love him as 'twere my own flesh and blood, and to think perhaps—"

Hope loosed her hold, and leaned against the back of the tall arm-chair. She was conscious of a most awful pain at her heart, of a sense of desolation too terrible to put into words.

"You fear that he is there, Rachel, in the mine?" her white lips asked.

Rachel, weeping now, could only nod her head; but, as Hope stood speechless, the other found her voice.

"And if he is there, he is dead—dead with the rest! Oh, heaven! it is an awful sight! I have seen many, but none as bad as this! And to think of him lying there, him so brave and good, tender-hearted as a woman, and as strong as a lion! Oh! Master Philip! Master Philip! it breaks my heart!"

"Don't! don't!" The words broke from Hope's lips with a cry wrung from her heart. Now she knew what this pain meant. Now she knew the meaning of the comfort and peace that had stolen to her gradually in the bygone months. Now she knew why instinctively she had turned to him for strength—for protection, as it were. Now was explained her pleasure in hearing him praised, her anger when Mrs. Hyde or any one of the so-called gentry about spoke disparagingly of the Squire's manager.

Standing there in a sort of cold, horrible dream, little things came back to her so clearly, little touches that had escaped her when given, but that made her aching heart swell now; little traits of his goodness, of his generous thought, his delicate mind.

Back across her own mind came the memory of that ball and of her suffering there, of his tender shielding of her; and now—now that she knew what it all meant, now that the horrible, blank despair, the black void in her life made by deceit, infidelity, and cruelty was suddenly filled by all that was beautiful and true in nature—there came this blow, and the best friend she could ever possess in the wide, wide world was torn from her!

She stood like one in a dream. The woman sobbing before her, the dog whining, the little servant running to and fro with the tears in her eyes, did not rouse her.

She had thought she had drained the cup of suffering to its bitterest dregs, but she knew differently now, as she had just grasped the knowledge that there might have been for her in life a joy marvellous, unspeakable, so she now grasped the meaning of sorrow in its most absolute and terrible sense.

The white, set face and dazed eyes frightened the little servant.

"My lady is ill! my lady is ill!" she said in a whisper to Rachel; but Rachel, worn out with sobbing, was rocking herself to and fro on her chair, moaning to herself.

Hope did not hear the girl speak. Her thoughts were with him.

"If I could have seen him again!" she was saying to herself. "If he could have known what he was to me, what he had done for me, my friend! Oh! heaven be good, and let him see even now, when he is dead, how dear I held him! how much dearer I could have held him had I been free to do so! Oh, friend—friend, true, good friend, I see now, I understand now! If I had only known and understood before! Philip, the best and truest of all men!"



"I AM YOUR WIFE. IF IT IS YOUR WISH THAT I AM TO RETURN TO YOU AND RESIDE WITH YOU, I SHALL OBEY,"
HOPE ANSWERED COLDLY.

"My lady is ill!" the little servant again said, trying to rouse Rachel, and then she stopped. "Hush! Hark!" she said, suddenly.

There was a noise outside, a clamour of voices, and the sound of many feet.

Rachel sprang from her chair, and with a cry ran from the room.

In a dim, far-off way Hope heard Philip speak. She put out her hand towards that shadowy voice.

"Philip!" she murmured, unconscious that she spoke. "Philip, my friend, good-bye!"

The clamour outside raged for a time, and then melted away.

Philip had nearly had his sound hand wrung off; the blessing of the people, the rejoicing in his miraculous escape, had almost overwhelmed him. He was faint from want of food, from some injuries, and from his long sojourn down in the mine. He was barely fit to listen to Rachel's hysterical greetings, his limbs could scarcely bear him; but suddenly, as at one bound, his strength returned.

Through the doorway he saw Hope's figure, read the white, anxious look on her face. Her eyes were closed, she swayed unevenly as she stood, and as with a low cry he hastened towards her, she slipped, and lay huddled and unconscious at his feet.

CHAPTER XXII.

The faint lasted some time. Rachel, now more mistress of herself, particularly with work to occupy her hands, and her mind at rest about her beloved master, had resort to every expedient to restore animation to the lovely delicate woman who lay so white and death-like before them.

"I am afraid I frightened her, poor dear, for I was like to have lost my wits, Master Philip," and then Rachel looked round imploringly, "Do 'ee go and dress your arm; I will not leave her, and a burn must be looked to 'once, Master Philip."

But she might have spoken to dumb walls for all the effect she produced. Philip knelt beside that silent form, and held one of the cold, small hands in his strong right one; the left was hung in a roughly improvised sling across his breast. The burning and the pain were excessive, yet he seemed unconscious of it. He felt nothing, knew nothing, saw nothing but that sweet white face that represented the whole light and joy of life to him.

"She is coming to now, sir," Rachel said, after what seemed an interminable time.

Both the servants withdrew, and Philip rose from his knees. He was scarcely recognisable, his clothes were blackened and torn, his hair had been singed, his beard too. He had a dark bruise on his forehead, and round his right wrist he had a handkerchief roughly twisted. He moved until he stood just out of Hope's gaze, and he motioned to Rachel to go and bend over her.

She looked about her dazed at first, but her senses returned quickly, and she was ready to understand all Rachel said.

"I'm fair sorry I frightened you so, ma'am," the good housekeeper said, "and all to no purpose. The master has come home, not much harmed, barring a few burns and bruises!"

"This is really so?" Hope asked, in a low, faint voice. "He is alive?"

"He is very much alive, Mrs. Christie, and most heartily grieved to have caused you all so much alarm." Philip's strong, steady voice sent a current of joy to Hope's nervous heart.

She struggled to her feet and put out her hand.

"You have escaped! Oh! it is good to see you again," she said, her face, her voice, her trembling hand giving sincerest weight to her words. "We—we were all frightened."

He drew her slowly forward and put her into the big chair.

"I am not very presentable," he said, as lightly as he could. "Rachel is making

frantic signs to me to withdraw and cleanse myself of all this dirt, so that I may not disgrace her."

"Deed no, ma'am; but it's his arm, Mrs. Christie," broke in Rachel.

"You are hurt?" Hope asked, quickly. Now that he was standing before her a sort of constraint was falling on her. She wished herself away; she was afraid to be with him, now that great knowledge had come to her. "If your little maid may go and see if my carriage is come I—"

"You cannot think of going yet," Philip said, in a most matter-of-fact way. "Rachel will be hurt if you do not drink some tea; and since she is so eager to doctor me, will you excuse me for a few minutes?"

Hope drew a deep breath when she was alone, with the firelight glinting about the room. She felt all at once weary and overcome, the anguish of that one moment had been so terrible. She sat lost in a sort of dream, glad to rest alone and quiet, wondering if her heart would ever beat in an even fashion again. She seemed to be another being in another world, as she sat there amid all his intimate surroundings. She longed to go, and she longed to stay. She was awakened out of the quiet self-possession that had become, as it were, her proper nature of late, and a sense of oppression mingled with her rejoicing over his safety.

"It was so foolish to faint!" she said, when he came down, looking very handsome, despite his bruises and burns.

"You have many a companion in your folly, alas! Mrs. Christie," he answered as he lit his lamps. "There is terrible grief to-night, and one feels so utterly helpless. That is the worst of it."

Hope was intensely grateful to him for the matter-of-fact way in which he dismissed her agitation in his presence, and listening to the heartrending accounts of the disaster she lost

her momentary constraint, and grew absorbed in all he had to say.

"It is by a miracle I escaped," he answered her expressed astonishment at seeing him so little hurt. "The poor man standing nearest to me was blown almost to atoms. I scarcely know now how it is I am here. I was knocked speechless for a long time, and got this burn through falling on one of the poor fellow's lamps."

"You must have suffered," Hope said, in a low voice.

"I suffered hearing so much agony around me, and being unable to alleviate it. But we will not talk of this any more, Mrs. Christie. You must drink up that tea, and then we will drive back as quickly as possible to Blairton, for I am sure Lady Hampshire will be nervous if you remain out so long."

"I will go at once," Hope said, drawing her furs about her. "But I shall not permit you to come with me, Mr. Leicester."

"I don't think," he said, with his rare and most beautiful smile, "I don't think that I shall ask your permission this evening, Mrs. Christie." Then he spoke earnestly. "I am sure you like to give me pleasure, and it will be a pleasure, indeed, to know you are home in safety. I must, in any case, go back into the town. These poor creatures seem to need me, or someone like me, to give them such advice and counsel as is possible." Then Philip looked across at her for a moment as she pinned on her veil. "How reminds I am, Mrs. Christie. I have never once asked you if you had need of me to-day?"

Through her veil Hope's delicate cheeks flushed.

"I came to pay you a little visit. There are one or two small matters I wished to discuss, but I almost forget them now. My chief reason in storming your citadel so unceremoniously was to learn the true story of this terrible affair, and to beg you to let me help you if it lies in my power to do so."

"You may be sure I shall count on your aid," Philip answered gently.

His manner was so quiet and easy, Hope grew almost into her old calm self again. She little imagined the wild yearning that filled him to kneel at her feet and kiss her poor, cold, trembling hands. Something of the truth had reached her in that moment of anguish, but not the truth in all its fulness and completeness. As they were leaving the room together Hope paused involuntarily.

"I have not said all I feel," she said, putting out her hand; "my dear friend."

He held her hand in a grip of iron.

"Call me your friend always, Hope," he said, using her name unconsciously. "Give me your friendship always. I—I shall be content."

They stood silent, hand clasped in hand for another moment, then turned and left the house; and in a very short time Hope was back in her own room at the Castle, feeling, in a strange yet forcible way that the pathway of her life was set in a new direction, that some great and subtle change had come upon her, and that she must be prepared to face a great mental, moral, and physical crisis, perhaps sooner than she expected.

The newspapers were full of horrors on the morning following the Meckington Colliery disaster.

A long list of the dead and injured from this explosion filled one column of the journals, whilst another was devoted to the full details of an appalling railway accident in the South of France, in which a number of well-known names among the fashionable world and English aristocracy figured, some amongst the seriously wounded, some among the marvellous escapes, and two among the list of those killed.

These two were a father and child who had travelled with several servants, two of whom shared with them the railway carriage that had suffered the greatest damage in the whole of the train.

The world of fashion and society was horrified and aghast at this fearful accident. Death and destruction had come upon it as indiscriminately as on the humble labouring classes.

Nearly everyone had some friend or connection in this train, for it was laden with sojourners in the Riviera, returning to England and their various homes.

Society shivered as it read of the disfiguring injuries that piquant little butterfly, Lady Bulow, had received, of Sir Algernon's broken leg, of another eminent statesman's fractured limbs; and there was a burst of pity over the announcement of the horrible death of Viscount Steermount and his little boy, Errol Kellie.

Universal sympathy was expressed for the Marquis of Gainsborough, not that Lord Steermount had ever been popular, far from it; but he had been the heir of the marquise, and his son Errol had been the heir after him, and now the title and fortune would go to that handsome scoundrel, Hugh Christie, whose conduct had provoked condemnation of late, even from the fastest and most reckless set.

The Gainsborough pride was proverbial, and everyone felt that the old Marquis would suffer as much at the thought of his honoured name passing to his dishonoured kinsman as in the sudden and awful calamity that had robbed him of his son.

Hope's heart bled for the old man. She felt a longing come upon her to go to him, but she did not encourage the longing.

She knew he had liked her well—as well, indeed, as it was possible for Lord Gainsborough to care for anyone; but she was Hugh Christie's wife, and to go to him now would be perhaps an ill-advised action, and one that would destroy any pleasure or comfort her society might have given.

She had never met Lord Steermount, but she knew him well by repute, and one shuddered at the thought of the grief that his death must bring to his plebeian wife and the mother of his child.

"I wonder Gainsborough has not had an Act passed by which he could cut off his eldest son from inheriting the title," Hugh Christie had said once to Hope. "Steermount's wife is as vulgar as she is high. I don't think Gainsborough has even seen her. Steermount married her for her money; she has heaps of tin, and she adores him. It would have been a jolly good thing for me if the old man could disinherit Steermount."

"But you are not quite sure that the second son is dead; at least, so Lady Anne tells me," Hope had hastened to say.

"Oh! my mother has always a crotchet in her brain. Of course Douglas is dead! Good heavens! a man must turn up somehow, somewhere, if he is in the hand of the living."

Hope had given a passing thought now and then to this supposed dead kinsman, and once, when her baby was born and christened, she had said to Hugh—

"I believe poor Lord Gainsborough frets after his lost son, Hugh. There were tears in his eyes when he asked me to call baby Douglas the other day."

To this Hugh had given a short laugh.

"What sentimental creatures women are, to be sure. Why, Hope, you would imagine there were tears in a marble statue's eyes if it only looked at that baby of yours! Don't waste your sympathy on Gainsborough. His heart is made of stone, and he cares about nothing or no one but himself!"

All this came back to Hope's mind as she sat scanning the newspaper, with its burden of horrors and miseries. It gave her a great shock to read Philip's name among those who were reported killed in the explosion. Although she had seen him with her own eyes, and knew him to be safe, the mere reading of his name made her heart beat with a return of that horrible pain she had experienced in the moment when she feared he was actually gone.

She was out as early as she could, equipped for walking, and, as she was about to start, Dolly Hyde drove frantically up to the door.

"Oh, fairy!" she cried, her pretty face quite pale and troubled. "Isn't it awful, and have you heard anything about Mr. Leicester? I can't get a true report. Here is a wild telegram from Uncle Thomas. He has seen Philip's death in the paper, and you see he is coming down here like a madman. Darling, will you drive with me into the town? I must know the truth."

Hope kissed the girl's pale lips, but she was conscious of a strange feeling towards Dolly while she did so—a feeling that had a sort of hot resentment in it, almost a touch of jealousy. She was herself again in a moment, and was driving briskly towards Meckington, reassuring Dolly as she went.

"I am afraid this will have given the Squire a fright, and I am sure it will have upset Dr. Gunter. I fully expect to see him arrive some time during the day," Hope said, as they reached Meckington, and drew up at Philip's gate.

Rachel ran out to greet them, and told them the master was well, and had gone to the station to meet the London train, which would most probably contain the Squire.

Dolly looked relieved and disappointed at the same time; but she asked Rachel a hundred questions, and insisted on Hope turning the ponies towards the station.

"I must satisfy my eyes that he is alive," Dolly said, almost gaily.

Hope drove along in silence. She had been glad to take the reins instead of Dolly, for the ponies gave her occupation for her hands, and prevented her from much talking. It hurt her, in a vague sort of way, that another might express this open solicitude about Philip whilst she must remain silent, and cloak her real feelings in a sort of semi-indifference. She would much rather not have sought him to-day, remembering the events of yesterday so clearly, and she seemed to have got out of her depths, as it were, and to be struggling in a kind of sea full of cross waves and different currents. The desolation and sorrow in the grimy town oppressed her, and made her miserable.

As they drove along they met a young man on horseback, and Hope pulled up to greet him. It was Donald Fairley, the young man with whom Dolly had flirted so assiduously at the Quincey's dance.

"Are you going to volunteer your services at the hospital also, Mrs. Christie?" he asked, as he bent down and shook hands eagerly with Miss Hyde.

Dolly shivered.

"What a horrible idea!" she cried.

Hope looked straight ahead for a moment.

"Will they let me help, Mr. Fairley?"

"Oh, fairy, you cannot do it; it is too awful."

"You will find my mother there, Mrs. Christie. She is great on sick nursing, you know, and insisted on driving in this morning to see if she could be of any use. But Miss Hyde is right about you—you are not strong enough."

Hope was transferring the reins to Dolly.

"Go on to the station. Mr. Fairley will escort you!"

"But Hope—darling!" Dolly looked a piteous entreaty.

Hope was already alighted, and standing in the road.

"I am so glad I met you, Mr. Fairley. I have been longing to do something. It seems so selfish for me to be sitting in luxury while there is all this suffering," she said, with a sudden rush of relief to her heart. "No—no, Dolly," she added, "you must go on to the station and meet your uncle!"

She waved her hand, and walked resolutely away.

"Take me to the hospital or the infirmary," she said to a small boy, and she held out a shilling as a bait.

"What has come to me?" she asked herself in a weary sort of way, as she followed the boy through the dull, dirty streets. "I feel as though something were about to happen. I am changed. I do not know myself. I—I am almost frightened at the change."

Arrived at the door of the infirmary, Hope forgot herself and her strange thoughts. Her courage almost faltered for the moment, as she entered the rough place, and saw the rows and rows of beds with their moaning occupants.

Lady Fairley, an energetic, motherly-looking woman, gave her a warm greeting.

"Indeed, yes, you can be of use. Come over to this poor fellow. Your soft little fingers will be just the thing to bathe his terrible burns with oil. We want all the workers we can get."

Hope threw off her hat and cloak, and set herself to her task as bravely as she could. She felt a great pang of self-reproach and remorse strike her heart as she looked at the suffering creatures about her. How often had she been tempted to rebel, how often had she moaned at the bitterness of her lot, and yet what was her sorrow compared to the misery and sorrow spread before her.

She grew pale and faint as she sat beside her chosen patient, and tried to soothe his agonies with gentle words and tender touch.

She scarcely knew how long she had been there. It seemed to her as though some peace had fallen on the poor lad. His moans had grown less as she sat beside him, his poor blackened head with sightless eyes, had ceased to move on the pillow.

Her tears had come at this evidence of his patience. She soaked the rags again and again in the oil, and laid them cool and soft upon the terrible burns.

"Heaven give you strength to bear it!" she whispered now and again. She lost all thought of herself in ministering to him.

Suddenly there came a great cry, wrung from a heart of anguish, and a woman flung herself on her knees beside the bed.

"Ah! Reuben, my mon! my poor mon! I ah found 'ee at last. Reuben, thou'lt speak a word, lad! it's me, your own wife!"

Hope had risen involuntarily.

"Come round here," she said, tenderly. "I fear he cannot speak much, but he can, perhaps, hear you better or see you a little."

The woman did not heed her, but went on muttering—

"Reuben! Reuben!" in a hoarse, low whisper. Suddenly she crouched on the floor, and hid her face in the bedclothes. "Oh, heaven!" she wailed, "my mon! my mon as loved me so! Oh! take me too! take me too!"

Hope grew faint. She bent forward, and looked at the poor blackened face on the pillow. She saw then what the wife had seen at once. No need for further ministration here—the man was dead!

She sank into the chair again, her hands clasped tight together, her eyes fixed on that poor weeping woman close beside her.

Oh! it was terrible! terrible!

She scarcely felt a strong hand draw her out of her seat, and lead her through the place till they came to the fresh air. But as the cold wind blew upon her she revived, and, looking upwards, met Philip's eyes.

It seemed to her the most natural thing in the world that he should be there helping her. She had grown instinctively to regard him as one who was always ready when she needed assistance.

Philip looked at her anxiously.

"I wish I had known you intended coming here," he said, quietly.

Hope smiled faintly, but sadly.

"Dear friend," she answered, "must I live for ever wrapped up in cotton wool? It is good for all to mix with the sufferings of others. We grow so selfish. We imagine that our little worries and troubles are the greatest the world can possibly give. We

need such a lesson as I have been taught to-day!"

Philip shook his head.

"I do not think you need such drastic treatment," he answered her.

Hope's eyes filled with a sudden rush of tears.

"Oh, that poor woman!" she said, brokenly.

She sat leaning back in her chair for a moment in silence, then she found herself looking at him intently; his pallor, and a certain, tired drawn look on his face made him wear an expression she had never seen before.

"You—you are ill, too, Mr. Leicester," she said hurriedly, feeling a rush of tender yearning in her heart over him, and losing her sense of horror in this new emotion.

"I am very well," Philip answered quickly. "This has been a terrible experience."

He paused a moment, and then he said in a low voice that was not quite clear, "Why should I prevaricate with you? Yes, dear friend, I am ill to-day—all at the heart, not in the body. I have had a great shock, a sudden unexpected sorrow. I have had bad news this morning."

"Oh! let me do something to comfort you, to help you," Hope cried, rising, in her unconscious sympathy and eagerness. "There must be some little thing I can do. I am your friend, Philip."

"You—" He stopped. He had clasped her hand in his strong fingers; his eyes met hers for a moment, their gaze penetrated into her very soul, and made her pale face flush and her heart thrill and beat in some delicious, harmonious way.

"If there is one living creature who could give me comfort and help, you are that being, Hope!" Philip said, his voice still low and unsteady. "To you alone in this wide world would I even speak thus barely of my sorrow; but dear," he could not control his emotion, "it—it must not be. You know, you understand, your sympathy is not for me. I must not, I dare not, claim it. I—"

he loosened her hands and looked away out across the dingy bit of ground that lay at the back of the infirmary—"I must leave this place, and at once."

Hope stood looking at him, her face as cold, as white as stone. Yes, she knew, she understood only too well. Had not her heart spoken yesterday when she had thought him dead to her for ever? She pressed her lips together to prevent a sob of pain, despair and yearning breaking from her. There was a long pause between them.

"I—I think," she said at last, calling all her woman's courage and delicate tact to her aid, "I think I must go now. Dolly promised to drive me home. I—need not take you away, Mr. Leicester. I know you have so much to do here. I will say good-bye—now."

Philip turned, and held out his hand in silence. They stood, hand clasped in hand, for that moment; then Hope turned and walked away out through the grimy, ill-tended garden to the road beyond.

Dolly's pony carriage was walking up and down. She had not had the courage to go into the infirmary in search of Hope, and had almost grown tired of waiting.

"You poor thing, you look like a ghost! Why will you do these things, Hope, darling? You must drive back to the Rick, and have something to eat. Have you seen Uncle Thomas? And oh! here is a telegram for you. The clerk at Meckington heard you were here, and gave it to me to bring to you instead of sending it by hand to Blairton."

Hope opened the buff-coloured envelope almost mechanically. Her face grew paler as she read, and a sort of pain seized her heart.

"Drive me direct to Blairton. This is from my husband. He is in London, and wishes to see me at once," she said.

She sat absolutely silent, weary and wan, as Dolly drove her briskly back to the Castle. She had said farewell to Philip Leicester. She had turned her back on the sweetest, purest love and sympathy that a woman could

desire; and now, when her heart was riven in twain, there came this summons from her husband to join him at once.

Hope had prayed often that forgetfulness and pride might wipe out her old romance for the man who had treated her so shamefully. She knew now that her prayer was answered. Henceforth, come what might, her heart was dead to Hugh Christie, and lived alone for the man she had met and loved too late.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Lady Hampshire was almost angry with her beloved grandchild when she learned that Hope intended to obey her husband's summons, and travel up to London to join him as he desired.

"Have you not suffered enough through this man, child?" she asked.

Hope, pale as death, made one answer to all her grandmother's protest.

"I am his wife; it is my duty!"

"Duty!" Lady Hampshire cried. "And is all the duty to be on your side?"

Then the old lady checked herself. She seemed to feel that there was a subtle change in Hope—that the old sentimental weakness she had so often deplored was not the real cause of the girl's persistent determination to join her husband. She could not put the thought in definite words; but Lady Hampshire had been a celebrated, clever woman, and she had not lost her sharpness of intuition, old as she was.

"The child is right," she said to herself. "She knows best. We old people think we can manage everything and everybody, but there are some things beyond us. She is right. It is her duty. I will say no more. Only I pray Heaven will guard her, and save her from fresh suffering."

"I will leave Douglas with you," Hope said to her grandmother. "He is too young to stand much travelling, and I may be back immediately. I cannot say until I have seen Hugh."

"The baby will be safe with me, my child," the old lady said; and then she added, almost as much to herself as to Hope, "I suppose this sad news of Lord Steermount's death has something to do with your husband's remembrance of you."

Hope made no reply. The same thought had come to her, but she had not dwelt on it. The only thing of which she was conscious was the fact that she must go to Hugh, and go with a sense of absolute abhorrence to so doing.

His character, bereft of all the tender touches which her heart had wrapped about it unconsciously, now stood revealed to her in its full vileness.

She knew him at his true worth. She had, all unknown to herself, been developing this frame of mind concerning him since that night at the ball, when the half-contemptuous pity expressed for her had stung her proud soul to the very quick. She tried not to dwell on all he had done; but nature was stronger than her will, and even while she prepared for her journey to meet him she shrank from even the thought of seeing one who had done all in his power to dishonour himself, his wife, and his child.

"Heaven give me strength to bear with this last trouble and to overcome it," she prayed to herself.

She sat herself resolutely to the task of putting Philip Leicester out of her mind altogether. Her sense of honour, of duty, of right must be stronger than her love.

She must shut the door on the last two days; she must forget that they had ever come; she must forget that such a man ever existed. If remembrance lived, then she was lost, for not even duty or principle could help her to kill the yearning, the longing, the desire that memory must bring.

"It cannot be so hard to forget," she said to herself, as she journeyed up to town. "I will forget! I will forget!"

"Alas! poor, fragile child, how little did she know of the agonies that that struggle for forgetfulness would bring!"

She looked worn, white, and tired when she reached the smart hotel at which Hugh Christie was staying. She had put on one of her old mourning dresses, and even her beauty seemed gone for the moment.

Hugh had no hesitation in informing her of this fact.

"What have you been doing to yourself?" was his first exclamation. "Good Heaven! you are an old woman!"

Hope winced—as what woman would not at such a greeting?—and the proud, bitter resentment she had tried to subdue rose again in her breast.

She checked the words she would have spoken, for she in her turn was shocked at Hugh's appearance.

He had lost that fresh, smart, handsome air; he had grown thin, and had a nervous look about him. In much pain she noticed a tumbler of brandy and soda on the table, and her mind went back all at once to something Lady Anne Christie had said to her in the first early days of her marriage.

"I do not wish to suggest anything, my dear," Hugh's mother had said, "nor do I for one moment imagine such a thing likely to be, but I hope you will use your influence against letting Hugh grow into the habit, as so many young men do now, of taking stimulants at all hours of the day. Others may be able to stand it, but Hugh cannot. He has his father's constitution, and grows more like him every day."

As her mother-in-law had been giving her sundry pieces of advice this remark did not occasion Hope as much discomfort as it might have done; and, indeed, she had forgotten it after awhile, save once now and then when Hugh had seemed to her to take more wine at dinner than was necessary. But it returned to her now with a sort of pang; and, indeed, there was that about her husband altogether that disturbed and pained her greatly.

It was but the result of the life he had been leading. Bad influence is quick to leave its trace, and Hugh's associates for the past six months had been of the most shadowy description.

It is impossible for a man, unless he be of the most pronounced and determined character, not to deteriorate under the perpetual influence of a woman who is lacking in all that a woman should be in the truest sense of the word.

Hope saw the effect without understanding the full cause, and suffered accordingly. She looked at him so long and steadily that Hugh fidgeted under her gaze.

"Confound it, Hope!" he exclaimed. "I am not a penny peep-show to be stared at just as you like. What on earth are you looking at? There is nothing the matter with me."

He turned, and looked at himself anxiously in the glass.

Hope sighed suddenly. The full horror of her life continually in this atmosphere seemed to come to her and to weigh her down.

"You sent for me?" she said, as she took off her hat and ruffled her hair on her brows.

"Yes," Hugh kicked the rug with his foot.

"Of course, you have seen the news of Steermount's death, and of his boy's, too? This makes a great difference to us. I am now likely at any minute to step into Gainsborough's shoes. He can't live for ever. He is an old man now, you know."

Hope waited for him to go on.

"So," Hugh continued, drinking up the remains of his brandy and soda, "it behoves us to come to some sort of an arrangement, you and I."

"As to what?" Hope asked, coldly.

"As to our future life—naturally," Hugh said, with an air as though Hope had ousted him from her life, and he were the most injured man in the world. "I do not want to coerce or to intrude upon you in—"

"I scarcely think the word intrusion is necessary between husband and wife," Hope broke in, quietly, coldly. "You wish—what?"

Hugh turned and poked the fire.

"Well," he said, having conquered a decided feeling of awkwardness that did not last longer than a moment, however. "Well, you see, Hope, there is no denying that for some reason or other—Heaven knows what, I don't—you and I don't quite hit it off. You have a bit of a temper of your own, and I can't stand a woman with a temper. If we were mere middle-class people a judicial separation would put an end to our difficulties, but, being what we are, we have to consider our position, and remember the duty we owe to society."

Hugh was very pleased with his flow of words.

"Therefore," he went on, "however much we may object to the arrangement, we must preserve an amicable appearance to the world. Of course, we need never interfere with one another. You can go your way, and I will go mine, but to the world we must seem the best of friends—a devoted husband and wife!"

Hope coloured.

"It—it will be somewhat difficult," she said, and she could not repress the sarcasm in her voice, "bearing in mind the full circumstances of the case."

Hugh frowned and looked at her sharply.

Decidedly she was changed. She was no longer the meek, clinging, loving child. There was a touch of strength of purpose about her. She made him feel uncomfortable; and, as has been often shown before, Hugh resented anything or anybody who made him uncomfortable.

"I have no wish to go into the past at all," he said, with a grand air, as though he were pardoning some great fault of hers.

Hope, even with the heavy oppression and sorrow upon her, could scarcely prevent a smile from curling her lips.

The scales had indeed fallen from her eyes. She had a sort of wondering feeling as to how she could have been blinded so long to the true character and nature of this man.

She felt a touch of pity for him. She seemed to read all at once the vain, shallow pretence his mind and heart were, and the great sense of justice that was so natural tempered her contempt. She would not judge him too harshly. Apart from any question of duty, or any tie between them, she would try and regard him as generously as she could.

Perhaps, after all, Hugh was not altogether to blame. His early education had not fitted him to bear himself better or nobler; and with his father's blood in his veins it was not strange he should have become what he was.

She spoke gently, with the sarcasm brushed out of her voice.

"And you suggest?"

Hugh was pleased to see the difference in her manner. He did not understand it, needless to say, in the right sense.

"Hope has a devil of a temper!" he said to himself, and in that summing up he saw an excuse for anything and everything he had done against her.

"I suggest," he said, "that you leave Blairton at once, and take up your residence with me. My reason for this," Hugh explained, "is that it is absolutely necessary to make our peace with Gainsborough. He is a surly old bear, and has Quixotic ideas of what one ought and ought not to do. I know he has not approved of our separation, and we must consider ourselves under the cloud of his displeasure; but once he hears we have come together, and you explain to him we are very united—He rather likes you," Hugh added, as though this were very extraordinary, "and—"

—And Hope understood all the rest. She knew now why her husband desired her presence so peremptorily.

The Gainsborough title must pass to him, but the Gainsborough fortune was the pro-

perty of the Marquis, to be bestowed as he liked.

Hugh desired the money with the title, and he looked to his wife—whom he had managed to forget very comfortably for so many months—to help him to achieve his purpose.

Hope felt a wave of disgust pass over her. Had there been a spark of honest pleasure and a touch of consideration in Hugh's manner in this their first meeting after so long and painful a separation, he might have won back some of the girl's old clinging affection.

The treasure of her deep, earnest, beautiful love was gone from him for ever. But Hope was not the woman to have turned coldly away from a word of remorse; and though she would never love him again as she had once done, so fondly and devotedly, she would never have let him know this, and she would have made him as true and faithful a wife as though he had been all that was good and noble to her.

But this evidence of his cold, selfish, mercenary, calculating nature threw her back further from him, and made her aching, troubled heart grow sick and cold.

"I fear," she said, slowly, as she rose. "I fear I have very little influence with Lord Gainsborough."

"Oh, yes, you have," Hugh said, testily. "My mother told me so months ago, and I saw it for myself. He has taken a fancy to you, and you could get what you liked out of him."

"I want nothing," Hope said, coldly, and then she spoke bitterly. "It—it seems terrible, Hugh, to discuss this sort of thing when poor Lord Steermount and his little boy are not one day dead."

Hugh looked furious. This was another sign of the change in him. Formerly he rarely lost his temper; now he was perpetually angry with someone or something.

"So I suppose I am to understand you refuse to do what I ask?" he said, curtly.

"I refuse," Hope answered, coldly, "only what is unnecessary. I am ready to do my duty. I am your wife. If it be your wish that I am to return to you and reside with you I shall obey. It is my duty, but," a colour dawned in her delicate cheeks, making her face lovely, "it is not my duty nor my intention to hunt Lord Gainsborough for his money, nor to give him of anyone a wrong impression concerning ourselves for a base motive. Will you please ring the bell? I am tired, and should like to go to my room."

Hugh looked at her almost savagely. He poured out some more brandy, and opened another bottle of soda water.

"You had better go back Blairton, and your old witch of a grandmother. I congratulate her on her pupil. You have become a first-class example of a disagreeable stuck-up female, Hope."

"I am ready to stay or go—which you wish," was Hope's answer to this.

"Curse your puritanical duty," Hugh said, savagely. "Go and be—"

He paused a moment, drank some brandy, then looked at her, and then rang the bell.

"No, you shall stay," he said, slowly.

"Since you prate so much of duty, you shall do what I desire, and so you shall stay." He gave the order for a bedroom to be prepared immediately.

"And serve dinner at once."

Hope sat silent in her chair. She seemed to be in some strange, uncomfortable dream. She could remember the time when the tone of Hugh's voice, as he had spoken to her to-day would have upset her, and made her miserable for hours together; but now she was conscious of nothing definite concerning him. All was a curious muddle of feelings, prominent among which was the truth that against herself, against her duty, her principle, her sense of justice, the fact that she despised her husband was not to be dismissed now, or, indeed, ever.

Hugh took up the newspaper sulkily. He was greatly piqued at this change in Hope.

He had known exactly how to deal with her formerly, but this quiet, cold indifference was something new.

Had she indulged in angry recrimination, had she commented on his conduct; had she even stooped to make some remark about Mademoiselle Désirée, Hugh would have understood his wife immediately, but he felt that this calm dignity of bearing, this quiet acceptance of his conduct, was something beyond him altogether.

When she returned to the room, having removed her wraps, he saw that his first opinion must be reversed. Hope had become a beautiful woman, far more beautiful as a woman than she had been as a girl.

He suddenly conceived a violent admiration for and pride in her. She would make a splendid Marchioness of Gainsborough, one worthy of place among the annals of beauties inscribed under her name.

They sat down to dinner in silence, and Hope found it almost impossible not to imagine that the past months had been a dream, and that she and Hugh had never been parted.

Everything was just as it used to be. He found fault with every dish, and swore at the waiters as he had been wont to do in their own house, and he made no remark to her whatsoever.

In the middle of dinner an interruption came. The waiter announced a gentleman below who was most anxious to speak with Captain Christie immediately.

When the name was brought up both Hugh and Hope started.

"Chadwick! Gainsborough's man. Something must be wrong!" said Hugh.

He gave orders the man should be shown up at once.

Chadwick, an imperturbable-looking individual, soon stated his errand.

"My lord was seized with a fit this morning on reading the dreadful news of Lord Steermount's death, and now lies in a most dangerous condition. He has asked for you, sir, and for your mother. I sent a telegram to her ladyship to Cheshire. My lord also desired the presence of Lord Woodstock."

"Is he very, very ill?" Hope asked, eagerly. It seemed to her as if the last few days had been full of calamity and horror.

She felt a great throb of sympathy for the proud old man stricken down under such a blow. She longed to give him some comfort, some help.

Hugh had risen to his feet. "I will go with you at once, Chadwick," he said, quickly. "I don't expect my mother can be here until some time to-morrow. Have you sent for Lord Woodstock?"

"His lordship will be there much about the same time as yourself," Chadwick answered, respectfully. "I saw him just before I came here, sir. Her ladyship did not wish him to go, but it seems my lord and he were friends long ago, and my lord seems to have a great wish to see the Marquis, sir."

Hugh knitted his brow, and Hope drew back quietly. The very mention of Brenda's name gave her an uncomfortable sensation.

She sat by the fire gazing into it, her brain full of complex and troubled thought. She was very weary; the events of the last two days had worn her out, but she felt she could not go to rest until she had known the worst or the best.

It touched her deeply to think of this proud, strong-willed old man struck down by such an awful calamity.

"And there is none to comfort him—none," she said to herself.

And then unconsciously, in the midst of the glowing coals, there dawned a man's face—a face with eyes full of deepest truth and earnestness. It was but part of the association in her mind. She had grown so accustomed to Philip's presence as a comfort, when she needed it most, that it seemed natural he should come to her eyes then.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Hugh Christie encouraged himself with some more brandy before mounting the gloomy staircase to Lord Gainsborough's room. He had no desire to look upon death, and once out of Hope's presence Chadwick had informed Hugh that the doctors had decreed his lordship's case to be most serious and full of danger.

"His heart ain't too strong, sir, it seems," the man had finished; and then he added grimly, "I never thought as how his lordship cared so much about Lord Steermount, and I know he couldn't abide the little boy. Strange thing," Chadwick continued in a perusing manner, "how his mind seems to have gone off the railway accident, and to be harping continual like on the colliery explosion. You don't happen to know as if his lordship were largely invested in coal, do you, sir?"

Hugh shook his head. He could most decidedly say he knew nothing about his kinsman's affairs whatsoever.

Lord Woodstock had arrived about five minutes before Hugh, and when the latter went into the room he found the old nobleman, himself a great invalid, sitting beside the bed regarding its inmate gravely.

"He is very ill," Lord Woodstock said to Chadwick. Of Hugh he took no particular notice. He did not like or approve of the young man.

"He seems to grow weaker."

A voice hollow and low came from the bed.

"Is my kinsman, Hugh Christie, come?"

"I am here, my lord," Hugh answered, quickly.

He approached the bed and stooped over the recumbent figure.

The light was dim, but sufficiently clear to let him see the ghastly change that had come over the Marquis. It was the face of a dead man that lay on the pillow. Hugh was horrified and alarmed, and shrank back as the pallid lips moved, and a few broken words fell from them.

Old Lord Woodstock moved with difficulty into the next room, and beckoned Chadwick to follow him.

"I fear the mind is beginning to go. He asked me for the evening newspaper. He seems to be thinking much more of that colliery explosion down at Meckington than of the other horrible accident."

"He's done nothing but harp on the subject all the time, my lord," Chadwick answered respectfully. "Sir George, my lord, he told me when he were here with the other doctors that it were not uncommon, yet I can't help thinking his lordship 'ave got some reason in his mind. He 'ad such a clear brain."

Lord Woodstock sighed a little. His old friend's sudden seizure had made him nervous, and not comfortable. He walked slowly back into the sick room. Hugh was standing by the bedside looking very helpless, and Lord Gainsborough's eyes were wide open, his lips moving fast.

"A judgment," he said, his voice thick and uncertain. "You said a punishment would come, Douglas. I am punished, indeed. The hand of Heaven is heavy upon me, Steermount gone, and you killed upon one and the same day."

The voice dropped into a sort of incoherency, and then grew clearer again. The three men listened intently. The long, thin hands were moving aimlessly about the bedclothes.

"Your mother's eyes, Douglas, lad. How you looked at me; it went to my heart. They call me proud and cold, but you knew better as you stood there, and by your look and words denied me, your father. You should have forgiven me, Douglas. I loved you, yes. Yes, I wronged you as I wronged your angel mother, but she forgave. She"—again the voice failed. Chadwick bent to hold some stimulant to the weak lips, but the sick man knew nothing, saw nothing. He lived all in the vivid dreams of memory. By-and-by the words grew distinct again. "It was all a slander, Agnes. Your pure heart could never have imagined the

evil they said of you, but it maddened me, and I became a brute. I broke your heart, my love, yes. I broke your heart the day I drove your boy Douglas from my house, marking him with the brand of a shame that was never yours. Agnes, wife, plead for me. See, Douglas will not know me. Look at his face. My heart yearns over him. Dead; yes—yes, I know—killed at his duty. Gallant lad, brave, noble lad. I have seen you, Douglas. You did not know I have watched you as you worked among the people. I could have touched you, but you would not turn. You are dead to me. With my own hand I did it, and Douglas Kellie lives no more." There was a silence for a moment. Hugh felt sick and nervous. The death-room with its mysteries was something he neither liked nor understood.

"Can we do nothing?" he asked Chadwick. The dying man heard him.

"He is my son! Before the world I proclaim—No—no, do not listen to him," he cried, in a curious wild way. "See—see, Philip Leicester. I kneel to you. Your father kneels! Oh! he will not listen. Douglas!—Douglas—Douglas! My son—my son!"

"His mind is gone utterly," Lord Woodstock said to Hugh.

But Hugh made no answer. A sudden light had come to him—a thought that made him stand like one stunned. For the moment his heart seemed checked. Chadwick looked at him and saw he had turned very pale. He had been bending over his master.

"His lordship has fainted, I think. I wish Sir George Newton would come. He promised to return in an hour's time. Perhaps, Captain Christie, sir, you and Lord Woodstock would like to wait downstairs?"

Hugh left the room with a sigh of relief, yet his face was heavy, and he bit his lip nervously as he went downstairs, followed by the Marquis of Woodstock.

"Poor Gainsborough!" the latter said, as he seated himself shivering in a chair. "Ah! it's a sad end, a sad end—a brilliant man. How his mind goes back! I never knew the rights of the story, but I always guessed he drove that boy of his away. He was mortally jealous of his wife, but how he could have doubted her to such an extent is more than I understand. Agnes Gainsborough was an angel!" Lord Woodstock by this time had cause to know his plebeian wife could not be classed in the same summary. "I remember the boy Douglas, a fine handsome lad, not a scrap like Steermount. To think that Gainsborough has carried this sorrow with him all through his life, and he has been called a man of stone!"

Hugh had poured himself out some wine, and now offered some to his companion. Lord Woodstock shook his head.

"Not for me—not for me." He looked out of his keen old eyes at Hugh's face. "Better for you to be without it too," he said, curtly. Hugh's character was not viewed leniently by Lord Woodstock. The young man made no answer, only paced to and fro moodily.

"What was the name he used? Something Leicester? Can it be that Douglas is living under an assumed name?" Lord Woodstock asked, after a pause.

Hugh answered him almost savagely.

"It is some disease of his brain," he said, in a surly way. "We all know Douglas Kellie died years ago."

He paced on up and down in the same moody fashion, and lulled by the sound of his footsteps, and by the warmth of the fire, Lord Woodstock dropped into a gentle doze. Something like an hour passed away in this fashion, and at the end of that time Chadwick appeared with a grave face.

"Sir George Newton would like to see you for a moment, sir," he said to Hugh.

"How is he?" Hugh questioned, eagerly. The man shook his head.

Sir George, the great physician, turned his

head as Hugh came in. He was supporting the dying man in his arms.

"It is well you should be present. He is sinking fast; he cannot last long, but he seems to have something on his mind. I thought your presence might be a comfort, perhaps, Captain Christie."

Hugh drew near, but it was evident the Marquis was not conscious of his presence. There was a silence broken only by that short, sharp, husky catch in the throat; and it might have been five minutes—it might have been another hour—when Sir George laid his burden reverently on the pillows, and with gentle fingers closed the staring eyes.

"There lies one of England's greatest statesmen," he said, in a hushed sort of way. He took Hugh by the arm and led him out of the room. "I suppose you will start for the South of France at once?" he said.

Hugh shivered.

"It is all ghastly business, but I suppose I must. My mother will be here to-morrow, and will arrange all there is to be done."

"Has the terrible news from France been confirmed?" the physician asked.

Hugh said "Yes."

"The carriage with Steermount, the child, and his two servants is simply pulverised!" he answered.

"So," Sir George said, "I have the honour to address you now as the Marquis of Gainsborough, my lord."

Hugh coloured, and then paled.

"Yes, since my kinsman left no issue I succeed to the title and the income," he answered.

"It is an old and honoured name. I congratulate you, my lord," the great doctor said, and then they entered the lower room, and Lord Woodstock was informed of the death of his friend.

Hugh, after a brief conversation with Chadwick, took his departure in a hansom, feeling peevish and annoyed at the prospect of his departure on the next morning early to the scene of the railway accident, where his presence, together with one of the Gainsborough solicitors, was necessary; and Lord Woodstock shook his head when he was alone with Sir George, and stood for a moment before entering his carriage.

"Gainsborough's successor will be little credit to the name, I fear," he said, in a sharp sort of way. "I did not care for Steermount, but at least he had some good in him, while this is nothing more nor less than a young reprobate. Ah me! poor Gainsborough! I am sorry he did not recognise I was there. He must have wished to say something to me, or he would not have asked for me."

"The blow was too much for him. I have known for a long time that his heart and strength were failing," Sir George answered; "but I did not anticipate the end so soon, and I for one am heartily sorry such a man has gone, for we have few like him."

The door of the great house was besieged with callers, who came to make inquiries after the sick man, and express their sympathy with his affliction, only to learn they called too late, and that another dread guest had been before them.

The news of the death of the Marquis of Gainsborough created almost a consternation among all classes of society; and those who had judged him dead to all human emotion reproached themselves sharply now for their misreading of the great statesman's character.

The world in which he had lived so long and so honourably was filled with pity for the terrible tragedy that had ended so fatally.

Universal respect was paid to the dead man, and a wish was conveyed from the highest quarters that his funeral should be such as befitted a statesman of his power and dignity.

Hugh had gone to France, and was expected to return with the remains of the unfortunate Viscount Steermount and his child as soon as the necessary inquest was over.

By the wish of the dead Lord Gainsborough, transmitted in writing to his lawyers, the funeral was to be as quiet as possible, and it was arranged that the three coffins should be conveyed to the family mausoleum at one and the same time. Afterwards, if the Queen still desired, the ashes of the statesman could be reinterred amid the dust of all England's best and greatest.

There was a gloom indescribable over the house. Chadwick had himself accompanied the young Marchioness of Gainsborough from her hotel to the mansion where her mother-in-law, Lady Anne, arrived at the same time.

It was a time of inexpressible sadness and something like bewilderment to Hope. She could not realise the sudden change in her life, and her heart was full of real sorrow over the calamity that had hastened this change.

On the evening of the day following the Marquis's death Chadwick was informed a gentleman desired to see him, and on going into the hall came face to face with a tall young man with a short beard, magnificent dark eyes, full of an expression that was almost indescribable.

"I have come to ask a favour," Philip said, for it was he, pale and wan, and his arm slung across his breast. "I—I trust you will grant it to me?"

Chadwick looked at the speaker in an almost startled manner.

"He has the very look of his lordship. Who can he be?" he said to himself. Out loud he answered deferentially he would do anything in his power to assist the man before him.

Philip drew a deep breath.

"Take me and let me look on his dead face. He was good to me—and I loved him," he said, and his voice was not steady or clear.

Chadwick fixed his eyes on the young man without speaking, and then, with a gesture, turned and led the way upstairs, still in silence.

Philip followed him, his hat in his hand, and stood gazing down at the straight, stiff figure that was all that remained on earth of a once celebrated man. His eyes were dim with tears, a yearning agony burned in his heart. He stood lost in the sorrow of the moment, then stooped, pressed his lips to the cold brow, and, turning, went out of the room.

At the foot of the stairs he pushed a bank-note into Chadwick's hand.

"I thank you," he said, huskily. "My friend, I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

His hat was on, and he had passed out of the great door before Chadwick could more than fairly murmur his thanks; and, as the young man passed down the old-fashioned courtyard that lay between the house and the street he buried his face in his hands, and groaned aloud:

"Forgive me, father—forgive me! If I had only known what lay before me I would have cut off my hand before it should have refused to touch yours in loving greeting that last and only time we met. If it is permitted you to hear your son speak now, hear him, my father, and send him your forgiveness!"

(To be continued next week.)

This story commenced in No. 2,049. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.

FLOWERS INVISIBLE

She'd watched the rose trees how they grew. Such flowers made their hands sweet, she knew,

But tenderness made ours.

So now, o'er fevered brow and eyes

Two small cold palms she closes.

"Thanks, darling!" "Oh, mamma," she cries,

"Are my hands full of roses?"

THE universal mark of manhood is manliness. Possession and position are the mere accidents of local conditions.

The Season for Colds and Chills

BILE BEANS COUNTERACT THESE.

Are you aware that the circulation of your blood has a lot to do with whether or not you catch cold? It has. A chill affecting the skin reacts upon the circulation. If this is vigorous, in nine cases out of ten you escape the effects of cold; if not, you fall a victim.

Liver and stomach disorders quickly affect the circulation, and as Chas. Forde's Bile Beans cure these ailments more certainly and more speedily than any known medicine, they should be used as a preventive as well as a remedy at this trying season. Mr. J. Ather-ton, a miner, living in Ormekirk Road, Pemberton, near Wigan, says:—"I had got run down and caught a very bad cold. Then influenza followed, and when it left me I was in a thoroughly broken-down condition. I had no appetite, was weak, dizzy when I walked, and so troubled with indigestion that I was afraid to touch food."

"My liver was disordered too, causing me acute pain beneath the shoulders; and constipation was a source of still more ill."

"Then I began to suffer from heart weakness and palpitation. These became so bad that at night I could only sleep on one side. If, in my troubled sleep, I happened to turn on to the other side I should be so bad with palpitation that more than once I thought my last hour had come. I consulted a doctor, but derived no benefit from his medicine, and it was not until I tried Chas. Forde's Bile Beans that I began to think I would ever again be well."

"As I persevered with the Beans I became better and the feelings of weakness left me. Once again I became able to eat and enjoy my food, and to digest what I ate. I am now completely cured."

The world over, Bile Beans have been proved a cure for sluggish and diseased liver, indigestion, colds, chills, influenza, constipation, piles, rheumatism, debility, anaemia, headache, female ailments, kidney disorders, and all blood impurities. Obtainable from all chemists at 1s. 1½d. or 2s. 9d. per box, or from the Bile Bean Manufacturing Co., 119 and 120, London Wall, London, E.C., upon receipt of prices. The large box contains three times the quantity of the small box and is far the cheaper.

Gems

He who does not when he can cannot when he will.

A Big error shrinks into nonentity when placed beside a small truth.

THE less some men know about a given subject the more they try to show off.

SOME people can express a trunk more intelligently than they can express an opinion.

DON'T despair because you are not beautiful. To be neat and loyal is possible to all women.

THERE is nothing so powerful as example. We put others straight by walking straight ourselves.

If you would hit the target, aim a little above it. Every arrow that flies feels the attraction of earth.

PRACTICAL wisdom consists in saying the obvious thing at the right time. True courage consists in doing the obvious thing in an emergency.

Do what you can, give what you have. Only stop not with feelings; carry your charity into deeds. Do and give what costs you something.

By rooting out our selfish desires, even when they appear to touch no one but ourselves, we are preparing a chamber of the soul where the divine presence may dwell.

ROSALIND'S VOW

CHAPTER XXVII.—(Continued.)

Seamer, his valet, was devoted to him body and soul, and it was he who had undertaken to get rid of the mastiff, Nero, by means of poisoned meat. He, too, had suggested Gaston as a likely person to aid; and, as Vansittart wished, in view of the possible failure of his plans, to run no risk of being seen, Gaston had been selected to enter Nona's sitting-room, and drag its mistress by means of the chloroform.

How the scheme succeeded we have already seen.

The carriage rolled silently on for some miles; then Vansittart, sick to death of the monotony of riding alone with that still figure and his own thoughts, sprang out, and threw away his cigar, while Seamer drew up to await his orders.

"We are beyond all reach of pursuit now," he said, "and the rest is plain sailing; so you, Seamer, can manage without my aid. Drive straight on till you come to the Lodge, then give Mrs. Vansittart into Mrs. Blackmore's charge, and tell her I will be at the Lodge first thing to-morrow morning. We are not far from London now, and I can easily contrive to pick up a cab, and drive to my club. I may trust your prudence, Seamer?"

"I think so, sir," responded the valet, and Vansittart, with a little nod, walked off, and soon found himself in a hansom, driving through the gaslit streets of London.

On arriving at his club his first demand was for an evening paper. One was brought, and he sat down in a corner to read it, turning the sheets over with some slight nervousness until his eyes fell on the word "Crowthorne," and he knew he had found the paragraph he wanted.

The heading was in large capitals, as befitted such a startling announcement.

**"TERRIBLE MURDER OF AN OFFICER AT
"CROWTHORNE.
"APPREHENSION OF THE SUPPOSED
"MURDERER!"**

Vansittart put the paper down, and sat for a minute staring into vacancy, while great drops of perspiration stood on his brow.

"Murder of an officer!" What did it mean? Claud Trevelyan was not an officer! and how was it possible that his murderer had been apprehended?

Then he took the paper up again in a perfect frenzy of excitement, and read the paragraph straight through from beginning to end.

"It is our painful duty to chronicle a terrible and mysterious crime, of which an old house in W—shire, called the Cedars, has been the scene. The victim is an officer of His Majesty's Army, named Fulke Marchant, and he was discovered a little after midnight shot through the lungs, and lying in a little plantation at the back of the house."

"At that time he was not quite dead, but had sufficient strength left to denounce as his murderer a young man with whom he was even then struggling, and who appears to have been a former tenant of the Cedars, concerning whom several strange reports have been bruited abroad."

"This young man calls himself Claud Stuart, but it seems doubtful whether this is his true name. He was at once apprehended, and will be brought before the magistrates to-morrow morning, when, no doubt, many strange details will come out in evidence."

"A singular circumstance in this tragedy is that, close beside the murdered man was dug a long, deep hole, which one may suppose was intended by the murderer as a burial place for his victim. It had evidently been freshly dug, and the shovel and pickaxe were both lying close beside it, together with a wooden box, which, however, was quite empty."

"Oddly enough, the first person to discover the crime was a young lady of position in the neighbourhood, to whom both Captain Marchant and Mr. Stuart seem to have been paying their addresses, and who, with a man-servant, was on her way home from visiting a sick girl in the next village."

"This circumstance adds to the romantic nature of the crime, whose motive, so far as can be at present ascertained, seems to have been jealousy. But all suppositions on the subject are premature, as the accused man, except for protesting his innocence, has maintained a complete silence, and has also refused to communicate with his friends. That further and startling developments are to be expected we can hardly doubt, and the public will look forward to them with intense interest."

This was indeed a most unexpected denouement; and at first, as he read it, Vansittart could hardly believe the evidence of his own senses. It was Marchant—Fulke Marchant, his old friend—whom he had shot, and not Claud Trevelyan!

But what brought Marchant to the Cedars at such an hour? How did he know of the treasure that lay buried in the plantation?

This was a puzzle to Vansittart, but it will not be one to the reader, who is aware of Marchant having played the spy when the iron box was consigned to its hiding-place, and who will readily guess that the knowledge of what it contained (given him by Vansittart himself at their last interview) had proved too much for the officer's scruples.

Now Vansittart understood what had perplexed him so much while he was waiting in the Cedars garden for Claud to come out. He had then felt quite convinced that no one had left the house.

Of course, Marchant had come in through the back gate leading into the lane, and, therefore, the first intimation of his presence the watcher received was after he had commenced digging.

It was all very strange and mysterious, but Vansittart was a practical man, and not given to troubling his brain with problems of which the solution seemed difficult. What he had to think of was the events that had really happened, and the way in which they were likely to affect him.

Reviewing the situation with the heartless calm that was part of his nature, he saw that the circumstantial evidence was strongly against Claud, while there was really nothing to connect him with the murder.

No one knew of his intention to visit the Cedars—no one had even been aware that he had left London. Practically, he was safe, and unless Claud could prove an alibi, he stood a very fair chance of paying the penalty of a crime of which he was innocent.

"It is fate!" muttered Vansittart, philosophically. "Luck has been with me, and against him. Well, the world is a see-saw, when the one is up the other is down!"

But he was doubly glad that he had made sure of Nona, who had now lost her only protector, and who was absolutely and completely in his power. He decided to see her without delay the next morning, and to keep from her all knowledge of what had befallen Claud.

This, owing to her affliction, would be easy enough, as she would be surrounded by his own minions, and would have no chance of communication with the outer world. What he should do with her—whether he should take her abroad, or let her remain in England—he had not yet decided. Probably he would adopt the former plan, as being the less risky.

Anyhow, he had full possession of a great part of her money, and this was a most important factor in his plans—indeed, so triumphant was he, that after a little while the shock of Marchant's death passed completely away from

him, and the only requiem he gave the man with whom his own life had been intimately bound up was a half pitiful, half contemptuous:—

"Poor devil! He had nearly run to the end of his tether, and he's as well out of the world as in it!"

Such is the friendship of wicked men!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Nona Vansittart got out of bed as the clock on her mantelpiece struck the half-hour past eight, and proceeded to dress herself with the deft, clever fingers that seem to be the special gift of the blind.

Her headache was better, the pain had gone, and all that remained was a dull throbbing, which nothing but a good night's rest would relieve.

Half-past-eight was the time Rosalind had calculated Claud would return, and as Nona went downstairs, guiding herself by the banisters, she half expected to hear his voice in the passage below.

But the house was very still—not a sound was audible, and Nona felt a curious thrill—half excitement, half dread—when she reached her own sitting-room, and was greeted there with the same ominous silence.

"Rosalind!" she cried; but there was no answer; and while she stood listening, a cold breath of air blew in from the open window—which, of course, had not been closed since Gaston's departure with Rosalind.

"She has stepped outside to listen for Claud," murmured the blind woman; but with some uneasiness, for she reflected that, after all, it was not a very likely thing for her companion to do, especially as the night was cold and uninviting.

At that moment, while she was hesitating, there came the sound of hasty footsteps in the passage, and Andrea rushed in, wringing his hands.

"Ah, Madame—Madame—such a misfortune—so terrible a loss!" he exclaimed, in his slightly accented English. "Nero is dead—poisoned! He is lying outside his kennel, stiff and cold, and I knew nothing of it till a moment ago. There is a plot, a conspiracy, and my master is not here to advise us!"

Nona sat tremblingly down on a seat, thoroughly upset by the news. She asked Andrea to give her further details; but, as a matter of fact, the man had told all there was to tell, and had nothing more to add.

He was a faithful and devoted servant, but he had no courage, either morally or physically, otherwise he would have kept the story of Nero's poisoning to himself, for fear of alarming his young mistress.

"Where is Miss Grant?" continued Nona, after a pause, and Andrea seemed astonished at the question.

"Miss Grant? I thought she was with you! I have not seen her since dinner-time."

"I think, perhaps, she has gone into the garden, the window is open. Go and see," commanded Nona, rapidly; and as the man obeyed she wrung her hands with a frantic gesture of helplessness. It was at such moments as these that her blindness pressed most heavily upon her.

Andrea searched the garden, called Rosalind's name, then came back into the house, carefully barred the window, and looked into every room to make sure she was not there.

At the end of his search he came back to his mistress with the news that her companion was nowhere to be found; and by this time it was considerably after nine o'clock—nearly an hour later than Claud had been expected to arrive.

"Rosalind gone—Claud not here! What can possibly be the meaning of it?" cried Nona, and the question was one to which Andrea could not supply an answer.

That something untoward had happened both he and his mistress believed, and the fact of the mastiff being poisoned pointed to a premeditated plot, whose nature it seemed impossible to guess.

Nona was driven nearly frantic with anxiety. Andrea was hardly less agitated. The worst part of the business was that they could do nothing but wait for events to develop themselves. Of the two, the man was certainly the more helpless, and his loudly-expressed fears tended to heighten his mistress's distress. At last she sent him downstairs. She wanted to be alone—free to think of what had taken place without interruption.

Was it possible Claud had been waylaid and robbed? On his return journey he would have a large sum of money, and a quantity of valuable on his person, and it was within the range of probability that this had become known.

Pursuing this train of ideas, Nona thought of the newspaper, which was sent morning and evening by post from London.

She rang the bell, and told Andrea to look carefully through the columns of the "Globe," and see if he could find any mention of his master, or of anyone to whom an accident had happened.

The man obeyed, and ere long his eye was caught by the self-same account of the murder as had first attracted Vansittart's attention. He read it aloud, and poor Nona's horror and dismay may be imagined—better than described. For a few minutes she was incapable of thought or decision; then she gathered up all her energies, and reviewed the situation as calmly as she could.

Whether Claud had killed Marchant or not was uncertain, but if he had Nona knew it must have been by accident, and thus the young man was morally innocent in fact, if not in deed. At any rate, her place was at his side. She could not desert him in such an emergency after all his kindness to her.

She understood why he refused "to communicate with his friends." His first thought was still of her, and he would not run any risk of revealing her whereabouts to her husband.

That he should be left to fight his battle unaided and friendless was not for a moment to be thought of. At least, she could prove his motive for going down to Crowthorne, and could dispel the horrible suggestion to which the newly-made hole had quite naturally given rise.

She hastily communicated her plans to Andrea. He must take her straight to Crowthorne, and she would, if possible, get there in time to attend as witness before the magistrates, when Claud's examination came on.

No matter whether her name appeared in the papers or not—no matter what publicity might be given to her miserable story—her duty was clear. At all hazards she must do all she could to prove Claud's innocence, and when that was once established it would be time enough to think of herself.

Andrea acquiesced in her arrangements, as was his usual custom, and in the excitement consequent on Claud's peril Rosalind's disappearance was little thought of. Of course it was strange; but Nona knew nothing of the young girl's history, although, from hints and certain expressions which Claud had dropped, she guessed that the companion had a history, and she was therefore utterly in the dark as to what friends or enemies Rosalind might have.

After a miserably anxious night, day dawned, and in the dim mirk of the December morning the blind woman and her servant set out for Crowthorne. On their journey they several times heard the murder discussed by their travelling companions, and the opinion that Claud was guilty seemed to be universal.

Once—much to the speaker's surprise—Nona passionately contradicted his assertion that the young man had killed Marchant in cold blood; and Andrea, who knew her nervous, excitable temperament, feared for the consequences when once the reaction had set in. At present she was sustained by the hope of helping the man who had risked so much to help her, and her thoughts went no

further than the examination at which she was determined, if possible, to give evidence.

Her one fear was that she would not be in time. She had caught the earliest train that left Paddington for Crowthorne, and yet she could not arrive there until one o'clock, for the train was a slow one, and there were one or two changes to make en route.

Naturally enough, she was in a fever of impatience that Andrea found it a difficult matter to control, and he was as thankful as she when, at length, they were deposited at the little village station.

There, a solitary cab was in waiting—a stroke of good luck on which they could hardly have calculated.

As a matter of fact, it had just brought a passenger to catch the up-train, and had lingered on in the forlorn hope of picking up a fare from the down.

The driver was in earnest conversation with one or two idlers who had gathered into a knot to discuss the thrilling event which had just taken place, and which would form the staple local gossip for the next six months.

It was with some reluctance that he detached himself from the group, but when he received instructions from Nona to drive "to the place where Mr. Stuart's examination would take place," he pricked up his ears, and his demeanour changed as if by magic.

Here were people actually connected with the murderer, perhaps, and it was his happy privilege to drive them to their destination!

"The examination was to be before Squire Charlton; and it would be held in the Justice-room at Crowthorne Manor," he told them; then he jumped on the box, and, in obedience to Nona's instructions, drove as quickly as he could until they reached the Manor.

On their way they were met by several villagers, who had given up their day's work as a tribute to the local excitement, and all of whom gazed curiously at the closely-veiled

woman sitting in the cab, and the dark foreigner at her side.

Nona—poor thing!—was spared the knowledge of their rude staring, and kept reiterating her request to "drive faster—faster!"

At length Crowthorne Manor was reached, and Nona and her companion were set down in front of the principal entrance—a mistake on the part of the driver, as the Justice-room was at the back of the house.

A man-servant was standing on the steps, paring his nails and looking idly important, and to him Andrea addressed his request, which he received with a stare of rude curiosity.

"You want to see the Squire, do you—about Mr. Stuart's case? Well, you may spare yourself the trouble. The Squire has no time to attend to everybody that wants to get news out of him; and as for Mr. Claud Stuart—he's safely lodged in gaol by this time, for the inquiry's over, and he is committed for the wilful murder of Captain Marchant!"

The man said this with insolent distinctness. He had not been at the Manor long, and was filled with a sense of his own importance and the comparative insignificance of other people.

Nona heard the words, and the shock they gave her was accentuated by the strained state of her nerves. Up to now she had been buoyed up with the hope of seeing Claud—or rather hearing his voice—and pleading his cause.

Now a sense of helplessness—of hopelessness—came over her. She gave a long, quivering sigh, threw out her hands with a gesture of forlorn despair, and then fell forward in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XXIX.

On the morning after Vansittart's visit to the White House he got up early, and entering a hansom was driven in the direction of Chiswick.

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Before arriving at his destination he sprang out, paid the driver, and went the rest of the way on foot. He was, as we are aware, a very cautious man, and he knew that cabmen have an inconvenient way of recollecting faces as well as destinations at inconvenient moments; therefore, he determined to run no risk. It is true he had done nothing illegal in taking his wife away from the White House, but, for all that, the occurrence was one that he would prefer should not be made public.

The Lodge, as the house was called, was a damp, and not particularly inviting-looking place, surrounded by high walls, and with a garden leading down to the river. It had belonged to Vansittart's father, and the son had once lived in it, when, for economical reasons, he had been unable to have rooms in the West-end of London. That, however, was some years ago, and since then the house had been uninhabited save for a housekeeper, and had gradually fallen into a state of lamentable dilapidation. But for its being heavily mortgaged, Vansittart would have sold it years ago. He had several times tried to let it, but without success. As a matter of fact, it was in too lonely and isolated a position to attract tenants, and the high wall that surrounded it, though it kept the grounds private, yet, at the same time, greatly added to the air of loneliness that prevailed.

Vansittart let himself in with a latchkey, and was met in the hall by a tall, dark woman of about forty, who looked as though ten or fifteen years ago she might have been very handsome. The expression of her face was now one of chronic gloom and discontent, which entirely marred the classical regularity of her features, and spoilt the beauty of the sombre black eyes.

"Well!" she said, grimly, without troubling herself to bestow any greeting upon him, "you have played a very charming trick upon me this time, I must acknowledge!"

"Trick upon you! What do you mean?" he demanded, with a frown, as he divested himself of his fur-lined coat, and hung it upon the stand.

"Just exactly what I say, neither more nor less! You think you can do with me what you like—that I am under your thumb as completely as if I had sold my soul to you, and were forced to obey whatever commands you might choose to give me!" she exclaimed, with sombre passion. "But you are wrong. Endurance has its limits, and mine has come to an end. Either that woman leaves the house to-day or I do!"

Vansittart stared at her in undisguised amazement.

"What the devil are you driving at? You knew quite well that I was going to bring my wife here directly I could manage it!"

"Your wife! And, pray, how many wives have you?" she demanded, with a sneer.

"How many wives have I? Are you mad to ask such a question?"

"Well," she rejoined, equably, "if the lady upstairs is your wife, then, to my knowledge, you have two."

"The lady upstairs is Nona Vansittart—as you are very well aware. I don't understand all this foolery. I can't make out what induces you to try it on with me!"

It was her turn to look surprised now. His tone and manner seemed sincere, and he was evidently annoyed at her remarks. She turned away, observing:

"Go and see for yourself. The key is in the lock on the outside of the door, so you will have no difficulty in entering."

Vansittart obeyed and went upstairs. He paused for a moment on the landing before turning the key. From within came the sound of hasty, agitated footsteps, as of someone pacing backwards and forwards, endeavouring by movement to control an overwhelming emotion. An evil smile came on Vansittart's lips as he listened.

"The bird does not like her cage. I am afraid restraint will be irksome to her," he muttered, and then he threw open the door and stood on the threshold, with his back against it.

A woman turned hastily and faced him—a woman with white cheeks, in which a spot of angry crimson burned, and glorious dark eyes full of passionate resentment. For a moment they stood thus looking at each other without speaking, then a cry of amazement broke from his lips.

"You! Rosalind Hawtrey!"

Rosalind made no reply, but still remained gazing at him with measureless scorn. Her awakening from the stupor caused by the drug that had been administered to her was followed by a period of intense wonder and outraged pride. Of course, she remembered nothing of her abduction, except the sensation of the handkerchief being pressed over her mouth and nostrils; but the fact of finding herself locked in a strange room, in a strange house, partially explained itself, and her suspicions had, not unnaturally, flown to Vansittart as the perpetrator of the outrage. His presence this morning confirmed this idea.

"What in the name of wonder brings you here?" exclaimed Vansittart, when he recovered from his surprise.

"That is a question which you ought to be able to answer without my aid!" she replied, with a desperate effort to conceal her agitation. "Indeed, I was about asking you what was your motive in laying yourself open to a criminal prosecution by bringing me here against my will!"

As she spoke a sudden comprehension of the mistake flashed across Vansittart's mind. He knew, of course, that Rosalind had been staying at the White House, but in his anxiety to secure his wife he had permitted the later love to lie perdu, thinking that an opportunity for pursuing it would occur later on. He now

recollected that Gaston had never seen Nona, and that his instructions were to drug the lady whom he found in the sitting-room, which Vansittart knew to be his wife's, and where he had not supposed it likely Rosalind would be.

He ground his teeth with impotent rage as he saw how fate had foiled him, and it was under the influence of this feeling that his next words were uttered.

"I wish to Heaven you were a thousand miles away!" he exclaimed, savagely. "I had no idea you were here. There has been some infernal blundering. It was Nona I wanted, not you!"

Into Rosalind's face there leapt the light of a great joy—a great relief. She, too, saw how the mistake might have arisen, and with the gladness of finding that she was the victim of a blunder instead of the deliberate plot she feared, there also mingled a most unselfish joy that the blind woman had not fallen into the trap laid for her.

"Under these circumstances," she said, quietly, though her heart was beating with suffocating rapidity, "you will not detain me here a moment longer, I suppose. I am willing to overlook the indignity offered me if I am permitted to go free now."

"Stop at bit," he returned. "The position is complicated, and wants thinking out. Suppose I open the door, and tell you you are at liberty to depart, what is there to prevent your going to the nearest telegraph office and wiring a warning to my wife that may have the effect of making her leave the White House immediately?"

She was silent, and startled by the subtlety with which he had read her thoughts—for he had accurately expressed her intention, and this her face told him.

"No," he went on, after a moment's pause, during which his eyes never left her face. "I do not think I can set you free at once, Lady Hawtrey. There are so many considerations

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against it, you see, and"—with a mocking bow—"you will readily understand, in spite of my former ungallant speech, that it is a very great pleasure for me to welcome you to my roof tree."

"I understand that you are behaving in a manner that is a disgrace to the name of gentleman!" she exclaimed, spiritedly, though his change of tone alarmed her far more than his brusqueness had done. "Surely you cannot mean what you say? You have made a mistake in bringing me here—which I am willing to overlook on condition that you let me leave this house immediately. If you detain me a minute longer, I will prove to you that your villainy shall not go unpunished."

It seemed as if he were attending less to her words than to the wonderful splendour of her eyes, the lovely carnation of her lips, as she uttered them. The spell which her presence invariably cast upon him was beginning to work again, and he was yielding to its intoxication. Her beauty, as she stood before him in the early morning light, was indeed a revelation. She looked like some Eastern empress, whose majesty has been insulted, but whose very pride keeps her resentment in check.

He laughed softly, as if in derision of her implied threat.

"How will you begin the punishment—what steps should you take?" he asked, with the most insolent nonchalance. "Suppose I elect to keep you here a few days longer, what shall you do?"

"In the first place, to keep me here will be an utter impossibility!"

"As how?"

"Because I am not a dumb creature, and we are not so far away from other habitations as to make it impossible for my cries to be heard."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Try the experiment. I don't fancy you will care to repeat it. As a matter of fact, it would be very unlikely indeed that you would make yourself heard, however loudly you might scream; and even if by chance such was the case, your cries would be attributed to the sad, mental affliction under which my wife is supposed to suffer. You see, I have provided for contingencies. If Nona were here instead of you, I might have to face the same possibility."

There was something horribly convincing in the quiet, cold-blooded tone in which he spoke. Rosalind involuntarily shivered; for, in spite of her bold front, she knew enough of the unscrupulous villainy of the man to fear him and his power. Supplications she felt would be of no avail. The only way in which she could hope to influence him would be by putting clearly before him the risk he ran in trifling with a woman like herself.

"Remember, Mr. Vansittart," she said, sternly, "I am not a child, neither am I a weak girl whom you can intimidate. So far, the wrong you have done me by bringing me here has been involuntary, and—leaving out the question whether you were justified in taking such means for forcing your wife to return to you—I am, as I said before, ready to look over the inconvenience I have suffered at your hands. But each minute that you detain me is an outrage to me directly, and I declare to you that if you do not at once release me that outrage shall be amply avenged!"

"Again I ask you—how?"

"You are committing an offence against the laws of England."

"Granted. Such offences are committed every day—every hour—and yet the offenders manage to evade unpleasant consequences."

"That is because their victims are too weak to bring them to justice."

"And you think you would not be equally weak?"

She drew herself up to all her stately height, and gave him a look that spoke her answer more eloquently than words. Whatever her faults might be, weakness did not count amongst them, and this he recognised.

"No," he said, "you are not weak, but, all the same, you would not succeed any more than the others. You see, the law is a very delicate, although occasionally, a very crushing concern. It wants tender manipulation, careful management, and, above all, it wants proof. Now, what proofs have you against me?"

She was silent for a moment, in sheer amazement at his audacity, and he went on:

"How could you satisfy the world, much more a court of justice, that you did not come here of your own free will, and that it was only when your reputation was irretrievably damaged that you made a violent effort to redeem it by some romantic story of an abduction?"

"Mr. Vansittart, are you a fiend in human guise?" burst from her lips, and he smiled as if he found the observation rather pleasing than otherwise.

"I am a man—no more, no less. I prove it by my devotion to you. Mephistopheles, you will remember, was insensible even to the charms of Helen of Troy; that beauty whose loveliness was:

Fairer than the evening air,

Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars."

I, on the contrary, am ready to yield myself, my fortune, my whole life to you, if you will only smile upon me ever so coldly."

He came a little nearer, but she retreated with a cry of horror, and a movement of repulsion that amounted to absolute loathing.

"Do not dare to speak to me in such terms!" she panted. "I hate you—I detest you! Even if I were free, and you were, I should still prefer death to words of love from such polluted lips as yours!"

He flushed a deep, dark red. There was no mistaking the sincerity of her tone, but it roused in him a certain fierce resentment that was in its way as powerful as passion itself.

His first idea, when he found out the error into which his accomplice had fallen, was, as we know, anger, but now a revolution had taken place within him, and a hundred different thoughts flashed through his quick brain in rapid succession.

He had the greater part of his wife's fortune, and the only motive that made him wish to get her into his power was the fear of what she might reveal with regard to Fulke Marchant's death.

Why not leave England altogether, taking with him the money and Rosalind? Then he could defy consequences, and, at the same time, inflict a bitter and lasting dishonour on the man whom he hated—Sir Kenneth Hawtrey.

(To be continued next week.)

(This story commenced in No. 2051. Back numbers can be obtained through all News-agents.)

The Small Leaks

By UNCLE BENJAMIN.

"What is the use of money unless you make use of it?" asks a friend at our elbow, to whom we have been preaching a little lecture on the reckless manner in which she gets rid of her earnings.

We have always believed that money was to use, and that its use should not be abused. The small leaks sink the large ship.

The man who earns from £500 to £1,000 a year does not spend large sums without duly considering whether he is to obtain a fair equivalent for his money. He considers the expenditure long and well; he talks it over with his wife; he takes counsel with his friends; and when he decides to part with so much he feels reasonably well satisfied that it is for the best that he should so invest.

But the small sums that go in trifles, such as fares, a soda-and-whisky, or a cigar, in the case of a man, or, with a woman, ice cream or confectionery, and all that kind of thing, are never thought about. It is too small a

matter to give much consideration, and no man begins to realise how much money is squandered that way unless he keeps an expense book and is careful to enter every little expenditure.

"Yes," says the man who is fond of spending money in these small ways, "but a fellow has to have something in life besides his bread and butter! What's the use of living, anyhow, if you can't have some fun out of it?"

Well, there is some reason in that proposition. Every man and woman wants to get all that can be got out of life. Everyone wants a change, and the tram-car and the excursion, and the trip to the seaside, only cost a few shillings—and what's five shillings? And what's the use of living if one must be all the time grinding away at work and hoarding up every penny? What pleasure is there in it?

Well, dear friends, life is not all pleasure. There is a great deal of trial in it. Most of us have constantly to exercise self-denial.

We must all live far short of the way we want to live.

The season of work—that is, work which assures an income—is short. It is even shorter than most of us realise.

It is no use to question the wisdom of such a state of things; it exists, and we must make the best of it and try and be prepared for it when it comes. Things in this world are just as they are, and who can help it?

A man's youth and strength must, to a certain extent, be expended in securing comfort in old age. Oh, his children will take care of him, you say. Well, perhaps they will; but it is quite as likely that they will do no such thing. You cannot always depend on children. And, in any event, it is better for "the old folks" to have their own means of support. They will feel infinitely happier, and their children will respect them a thousand times more.

And whatever may be said on the sentimental side about "filial love," etc., there is nothing sadder in all the world than the too common spectacle of the "old folks" living in homes where they are considered a burden and in the way; and where, to use a well-worn but expressive phrase, "they dare not say their souls are their own."

It may be lonely in the old home, with the children gone, but it is home; and if the children are in a lukewarm state of filial regard, the lonely old house is far better than the place where coldness and neglect sadden the hearts through which the blood of age flows feebly, and the power to rise above the depressing effects of ill usage is weakened.

With money to pay for it, good care can always be assured; and if the "old man" wants to take off his boots and sit in his stocking feet before the fire, and if the "old woman" wants to cook onions and cabbage and wear calico aprons, who is to hinder?

So the young man who is earning money may permit the suggestion—save something every day. No matter if you don't see the seven-headed goat of South Africa, or the fifteen-toed Asiatic lion, or the man who can swallow a round dozen of butcher knives all at once and thrive on the operation; next week you will have forgotten that those stupendous spectacles were ever on exhibition, and your money will be in your pocket instead of in the pocket of the other fellow.

"Well," you say, "this life of petty economy is hard," and we reply, of course it is. Nobody disputes it. Life is always hard when we kick against its conditions, and it is tremendously hard when the poor man and his wife are determined to act and live as the rich man and his wife act and live. Our lives must be suited to our means, and we must determine to be contented with what is for us, and not with what we would like to have.

THE COOK AGAIN.—"I noticed a large crowd gathered in front of your house this morning. Worrit; what was the matter?" "I was discharging the cook."

Facetiae

NOT ANXIOUS.—"Poor man," said the inquisitive old lady, "I guess you'll be glad when your time is up, won't you?" "No, ma'am, not particularly," replied the prisoner. "I'm up for life."

MAKE LOVE SLOWLY; MANY a man has paid ten dollars for an engagement ring, and two hundred and fifty dollars for a divorce. It's like a church fair—ten cents. to get in and five dollars to get out.

"Do you think my daughter will ever become a musician?" asked a fond mother of the professor. "I gant say," answered the professor. "She may. She dell me she gome of a long-lived family."

TAKEN LIFE SO EASY.—Travelling Tank: "I tell ye, I'd like to be a doctor." Bumm De Way: "Why—cause ye'd be around bottles most of the time?" Travelling Tank: "No, the doctor can take life so easy, see!"

BACK NUMBERS.—A clergyman in an Australian city was reminding one of his congregation that "all the hairs of our heads are numbered." The parishioner who was bald turned sharply round, and said: "You don't know where I can get any back numbers, do you?"

INTELLIGENT WAITERS.—"One of our troubles at the club," said Augustus, "has been to make the waitahs distinguishable from the members at our evening weceptions. But we've solved it at last." "So I see," remarked Archie. "You've got intelligent looking waitahs."

"How hideous Miss Blakely looked in that new bonnet." "I thought it was very becoming. At least, the trimming was very appropriate." "I didn't notice the trimming." "The bonnet was trimmed with ivy leaves. Ivy is very appropriate. It only clings to old ruins."

"Oh, yes; he's quite a remarkable man. Able to concentrate his mind on one particular subject, no matter how great the crowd and confusion around him. His power of abstraction is simply wonderful." "What is his special branch of science?" "Kleptomania, I think they call it."

Mrs. FIBBINS has written to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals to know if something can be done to prevent horses being scratched. She is sure it must be very painful, because her husband is quite upset, and she hears him groan in his sleep about a horse being scratched.

ELECTROCUTION, if generally adopted as capital punishment, will save the relatives of the unfortunate the shame of acknowledging that the misguided connections died on the gallows. All that the descendant of an electrocuted will have to say will be, "Grandfather died 18—; he was struck by lightning."

UNDER A CLOUD.—"They tell me—er how Sim Perkins' man Jones hez disappeared," said the farmer to his neighbour as he leaned over the back fence. "Yap; that's so," replied Farmer Skimpson. "They do say ez how he went away under a cloud." "Yew don't tell! How was thet?" "He was blowed away in a cyclone, down in th' medder."

BOREM: "Still living in Jersey, eh?" Hustler: "Yes; I have no thought of coming back to the city." Borem: "But it must be very inconvenient, forty minutes by train and fifteen by boat every day, and you've got to catch both right on the minute." Hustler: "That's what I like about it. You see, when people buttonhole me and get to talking, all I have to do is to jerk out my watch, mutter something about train time, and I get away without giving offence. See." Borem: "Ha, ha! That's good. That reminds me of a little thing Saphhead was telling last—"
Hustler: "By-the-way, it's train time now. Ta-ta!"

THE FASHION CHANGING.—Mrs. Style: "I want a hat, but it must be in the latest style." Shopman: "Kindly take a chair, madam, and wait a few minutes; the fashion is just changing."

"Mrs. BUMPUS," said the dentist, severely, "I have pulled teeth for a great many patients, but I never heard any one holler as you do." "Perhaps it was a holler tooth," suggested the poor woman, meekly.

FOND PARENT: "I fear, young man, that you seek my daughter's hand solely for her wealth." Young Man: "Well, look at her candidly and kindly mention what other qualifications she possesses."

FISHMONGER: "I'd like you to know I keep nothing but the best fish!" Customer: "That may be; but I'd like you to sell some of it to me this time." That floored the fishmonger, who ran to the ice-house in a hurry.

"Yes," said the chairman, sadly, "our temperance meeting last night would have been more successful if the lecturer hadn't been so absent-minded." "What did he do?" "He tried to blow the foam from a glass of water."

TEACHER: "Who can tell me what useful article we get from the whale? Johnny?" Johnny: "Whalebone." Teacher: "Right! Now what little boy knows what we get from the seal? Tommy?" Tommy: "Sealing wax."

"CLARA, dear, I want to show you my new engagement ring before I go." "It's very pretty, but remember the stone is loose." "Why, how do you know that?" "Didn't Mr. Rigby tell you I wore it a month or two?"

"I WANT something for my boy to work at," said an anxious father to a friend. "What can he do?" "Well," replied the father, with a sigh, "I really don't know. He is too light for heavy work, and too heavy for light work."

"WHEN a man makes a large fortune, what do people say?" asked a teacher. "That he is fortunate," replied the bright boy. "That's right. Now, when a man fails in business, what do they say?" "That he didn't advertise."

"YES, indeed," said little Amy's aunt, "you shall come to the country and see us milk the cows." "What's that, auntie?" "Why, that is how we get the milk for our coffee at breakfast." "Oh!" said Amy, knowingly, "we do it with a can opener."

THE professor was a little confused at calling the roll, but there was no excuse for him to make the following statement:—"If any man is absent, and somebody else answers to his name, that man will be marked absent whether he is absent or not."

Mrs. DE MOVER: "Sakes alive! This is the noisiest neighbourhood I ever got into. Just hear those children screech." Maid: "They're your own children, mum." Mrs. De Mover: "Are they? How the little darlings are enjoying themselves."

CARKER (calling on friend): "Mercy! What's that frightful shouting upstairs?" Servant: "That's Mr. Barker, sir." Carker: "Why I thought he had lost his voice." Servant: "He had, sir; but he has just received the doctor's bill."

"I HEAR that your rival has been successful in becoming engaged to Miss Golding," said a young man to his friend. "Yes, I did my best, but he was more clever than I." "Indeed; how was that?" "He was wise enough to let her father beat him at billiards, and I wasn't."

A MYSTERIOUS DISH.—"The vicissitudes of this life are wonderful!" exclaimed the boarding-house keeper at breakfast the other morning. "True; a man can never tell what he's got before him," replied the sarcastic boarder, with a side glance at the plate of hash in front of him.

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FWS

USED TO IT.—The Lawyer: "I really hope I don't annoy you with all these questions." His Fair Client: "Not at all. I'm used to it. I have a six-year-old son."

SHE: "If you had told me you weren't feelin' well I'd have fixed up some of these old-fashioned remedies a couple of days ago." He: "Yes, I know. That's why I didn't say anything about it."

HARDWORKED.—Mrs. Dash: "Your clergyman complains that he is too hardworked." Mrs. Crash: "He doesn't know what hard work is! Humph—you ought to see our progressive euchre club getting his salary together!"

"I AM afraid our friend has said something he will be sorry for." "No," was the melancholy answer. "I don't think so. Anybody who didn't know better than to say what he did in the first place isn't likely to know when it's time to be sorry."

HER ACCOMPICE.—"Sallie Twitters is to be married," said Mrs. Kilduff to her brother, who is a crusty bachelor. "Ah," replied he, "who is her victim?" Then seeing a baleful look in his sister's eye, he added: "I should say, who is her accomplice!"

A REMINISCENT writer, in speaking of the wife of a celebrated man, amiably remarked: "Though, I never had the pleasure of her acquaintance, she is said to have been an estimable lady." What this estimable lady might have been had she been able to profit by this man's acquaintance must remain a matter of conjecture.

Helpful Talks

BY THE EDITOR.

The Editor is pleased to hear from his readers at any time.

All letters must give the name and address of the writers, not for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith.

GOLDFOOT.—It was in 1731 that an Act was passed that "all proceedings in courts of justice should be in the English language, instead of Latin."

THOMAS.—The exhibition building of 1862 was 250 feet high to the top of the domes. The top of the cross of St. Paul's is 360 feet from the pavement.

M. M.—For all information respecting the Civil Service and the examinations, apply at the offices of the Commissioners, Cannon Row, Westminster.

ILL-USED.—When an agreement to marry has been broken by mutual consent, the strict etiquette is that all letters and presents should be returned on both sides.

J. JAMES.—Apply to the district surveyor of highways. Owners of property cannot lawfully take in any portion of a road that has been a public one for twenty years and upwards.

DAMON.—Madame Jenny Lind, who was a Swede by birth, made her first appearance in London in the part of Alice, in Meyerbeer's "Robert the Devil," at Her Majesty's Theatre, on May 4, 1847.

AMY.—I should advise you to let things remain as they are. If the gentleman wished to keep up the acquaintance he would have answered your letter. You can hardly write again. No young lady would do such a thing.

ICE QUEEN.—Furs of every kind can be preserved from moths by sprinkling dried lavender flowers among them, and then folding them up well in a calico covering. As moths rarely penetrate calico they are thus prevented from depositing their eggs among the fur. It is the young worm of the moth that eats the fur, not the moth itself.

IONE.—The taste of medicine may be well disguised by eating a few chocolate-drops before the physic is taken.

JANE.—Washing lamp glasses often makes them crack; if regularly attended to they can be kept perfectly bright by the daily use of a soft duster and leather. Greasy finger marks are removed with the help of a little benzine.

J. B.—Savings-banks are not of English origin. The first was established at Berne over a hundred years ago. The system quickly grew when it was introduced into England, and was brought under Parliamentary control in the year 1816.

NURSE ANN.—Nothing so quickly restores tone to exhausted nerves and strength to a weary body as a bath containing an ounce of aqua-ammonia to each pailful of water. It makes the flesh firm and smooth as marble, and renders the body pure and free from all odours.

ANXIOUS ONE.—If it is proved that you are in regular work and receiving wages, you can, of course, be compelled to contribute to the support of your mother. But no son or daughter should find it necessary to ask such a question. It is a matter of duty to do all that you can.

READER.—The proverbs or mottoes quoted are Spanish. I give the translation of them as follows: "Of evils choose the least;" "You cannot make a purse of a sow's ear;" "Life without a friend is death without a witness;" "He that hath a head made of glass must not throw stones at another."

C. ETTON.—When the damp on walls is caused by inferior bricks having been used in their construction, which absorb instead of resist the wet, an outer coating of tar and lime will be found the cheapest remedy for the back and sides of a house; but as it is too dingy for the front, cement or patent outside paint must be used.

COOK.—Charlotte Russe is easily made as follows: Line a glass dish with thin slices of stale sponge cake; to one half-pint of cream add one teaspoonful of vanilla, four spoonfuls of powdered sugar and a little pinch of soda; whip stiff with a revolving egg-beater, and as fast as the stiffened froth rises skim it off and pile high over the cake.

FITZ HUGH.—Wet, wetter, and wettest are the three degrees of comparison of the adjective "wet."

MILES' BOX.—(1) Any person is allowed to visit the State apartments in Windsor Castle when the King is not residing there. A charge of one shilling each person is now made. (2) There unquestionably was such a person as Mother Shipton, but I am inclined to fancy that her so-called prophecies are apocryphal. The talent for ministering to human credulity was not born yesterday.

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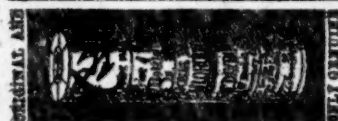
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